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THE
HISTORY,
OF
CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL CHURCH
PRIOR TO
THE REFORMATION.

In Two Volumes.

VOL I.

BY
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P R E F A C E.

THE present work has been written for the use of readers anxious to acquire a general knowledge of events connected with the establishment and progress of the Christian Church. It is founded throughout on the best available authorities; and the writer has not, knowingly, allowed himself to be influenced by prejudice, or mere private views, in the representation of either principles or characters. A brief mention only has been made of some subjects, which, in a larger History, would have claimed more particular notice; but the design of the work will be accomplished, if it enable the reader to form a proper estimate of the means which have most tended to the furtherance of truth and holiness, and to avoid the errors which are common even among thinking men unacquainted with the history of their religion.

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HISTORY .

OF

CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH — PARTICULAR CHURCHES — DIVISIONS
AND PERSECUTIONS — EPISTLE OF ST. CLEMENT TO THE
CORINTHIANS.

THE church of Jesus Christ is that body of people, or congregation of believers, which, having been redeemed by his blood, and united to himself, he has undertaken to render perfect in holiness, and finally to exalt to a state of heavenly glory. This church, visibly established and consecrated on the day of Pentecost, was instructed for more than half a century by teachers and pastors who had seen the Lord, and who had been partakers of those especial gifts of grace which were to preserve them from any material error either in doctrine or practice. As a body animated by one spirit, and destined to attain a particular end, the church is ever to be viewed and spoken of as one both in form and essence. But though it is thus that we are taught to consider it when looking simply to its perfection in Christ, and to its ultimate glories, the very circumstance that it consists of parts and members, shows that it is capable of increase and decline, and must, therefore,

be viewed under a variety of aspects, and sometimes as a whole, and sometimes in its divisions. Existing in every age since its first consecration by the heavenly Spirit, as the church of God, it nevertheless cannot be regarded as having reached its fulness or completeness, while there are still some whom Christ has purposed to save not yet called and sanctified.*

It hence arises that in order to form a right notion of the increase of the church, considered in the more absolute sense of the word, we must mark the rise and progress of those societies of Christians in different ages and countries who had nothing in common but their faith and hope. To each of these societies, whether large or small, has been given by usage, established on apostolic authority, the title of a church, a name significant of high dignity and responsibilities, and only proper, therefore, to the society so long as it continues to hold the living truths which give it, as a member of the universal

* Thus it is said of Christ: He is the head of *the body, the church*: and St. Paul, speaking of his own afflictions, says, that he bore them for the sake of *Christ's body, the church*. Colos. i. 18, 24. And this body, of which Christ is the head, is represented as "by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, *increasing with the increase of God*." Colos. ii. 19. So also Christ is said to *love the church*, and to have given himself for it; "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself *a glorious church*." Ephes. v. 25—27. But it is also said, that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Acts ii. 47; showing its progressive growth; and showing also how it was divided into several branches. We read that Barnabas and Paul "ordained them elders *in every church*." Acts xiv. 23. And so we have "*the churches of Galatia*." Gal. i. 2. And "*the church*" which is in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. Rom. xvi. 5. And "as I teach everywhere *in every church*." 1 Cor. iv. 17.

church, a close and entire correspondence with its divine original.

In this respect the church of Jerusalem has been commonly called the mother church, and under the superintendence of St. James the younger, the brother of our Lord, it continued for many years to be regarded as the centre of union to the several evangelical communities. St. James is spoken of in ecclesiastical history as the first bishop of Jerusalem ; and such was his reputation for virtue and piety, that he seems to have exercised considerable influence, not only over his brethren, but over many of the yet unbelieving Jews. Enraged at his popularity, Ananus, the high-priest, plotted his destruction. For this purpose he placed him, during the celebration of a public festival, on the flat roof of a building in the neighbourhood of the temple, and exhorted him to proclaim in the presence of the people, that he disowned Jesus. Instead of obeying the impious summons, the holy man declared with a loud voice that Jesus was even then sitting on the right hand of God, and would come again in the clouds of heaven to judge the world. No sooner had he uttered these words, than some of the Scribes and Pharisees who stood by flung him to the earth. Not dying immediately, he raised himself upon his knees and began to pray, supplicating God to have mercy upon his murderers. Unmoved by his piety and meekness, they proceeded to stone him, and he was finally dispatched by a fuller, who struck him to the ground with his staff.*

The cause of the persecutors gained nothing by the death of this venerable pastor of the church at Jerusalem. His martyrdom appears to have produced the same effects

* Hegesippus : *Routh Reliquiæ Sacræ*, t. i. p. 192.

as the sufferings of God's people in after times. Many of those who beheld the patience and charity which shone so conspicuously in the last instance of his faith and devotion, yielded to the impression made upon their hearts, and became faithful disciples of the Saviour. St. James was succeeded in his presidency by a man of similar character, the pious Symeon, son of Cleopas, and therefore, on the side of Joseph, one of our Lord's relations. He is said to have been elected by the common consent of such of the apostles as could be then gathered together in Jerusalem; and he continued to conduct the affairs of the church till the time of Trajan, when he was put to death by crucifixion, and with many tortures, in the 120th year of his age.*

But while due veneration and authority were now attributed to that province of the church which had such peculiar claims to respect, it was, unhappily, soon to be deprived of the importance which it enjoyed. The judgment of God was already pronounced upon the devoted city which had rejected the Author of the gospel himself; and the few who still worshipped him within its walls were to be conducted by his care to other and distant homes. Scarcely forty years had passed since our Lord's ascension, when Jerusalem lay a heap of ashes at the foot of the conqueror. The Christians warned, it is said,† by a particular oracle, as well as by the earlier prophecies of their heavenly master, and assured by his declaration, that not a hair of their head should perish, had sought refuge, before the commencement of the siege, in the little town of Pella, beyond the river Jordan. There, for a time, they

* *Hegesippus: Routh Reliquiæ Sacræ*, t. i. p. 198.

† *Eusebius Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. v.*

continued to enjoy among each other the blessings and privileges belonging to their evangelical communion ; and, when necessity obliged them, they only separated to promote by their teaching and example the further diffusion of the word of life. • •

When St. Paul was first commissioned to preach the gospel, no church existed but that of Jerusalem. Before his divinely appointed course was finished, churches had been planted in all the most important cities of the world, even in Rome itself. And singular must have been the aspect which these cities presented to a devout mind, with all their subject provinces and political relations, when converted into shrines or fortresses of the truth, taken possession of by the preachers of the gospel, and that in defiance of the fiercest prejudices of heathenism and heathen governments. The believer must have felt as he contemplated them, that the powers of the world were shaken, and that the irresistible energy of the heavenly word would soon, like the mighty sword of a conqueror, sweep away every obstacle to the progress of the kingdom of God.

We cannot suppose that any of those to whom our Lord had given the command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," remained idle after receiving the Holy Ghost. Hence a probability is given to the common tradition, that the apostles travelled into the remotest regions of the world ; and there is no reason to disbelieve the report that St. Andrew traversed the wilds of Scythia, and that St. Philip ended his ministry by martyrdom at Hierapolis in Phrygia : that St. Thomas taught the gospel to the Parthians, and to the inhabitants of the remotest parts of India ; while St. Bartholomew employed the chief portion of his life in evangelizing Armenia.

In Asia Minor the labours of St. John were crowned by the churches of Sardis, Pergamos, Thyatira, Smyrna, Philadelphia, and Laodiceæ ; and though Timothy is generally recognised as Bishop of Ephesus, it is equally well ascertained that St. John exercised a supreme authority and superintendence over the whole of the churches of this extensive province.

But the gospel had not been thus widely diffused without encountering opposition from the enemies of God. This was of a twofold character. In the church itself appeared false brethren, unawares brought in*—"evil men and seducers." And hence the ancient historian Hege-sippus says, that up to the time of Trajan, that is, till near the close of the first century, the church retained its virgin purity ; those who were preparing to corrupt its doctrines not venturing to show themselves openly while the apostles were still alive, but that after they were removed, heresy no longer dreaded to oppose the truth, by all the means which fraud and malice could supply.†

The origin of the earliest disputes and corruptions existing in the church may readily be traced to the doubts and perplexities of some, and the pride of others, who, though they were ready to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, could not be brought to account the merits of his sacrifice, and the power of his grace and spirit, sufficient to save them without the rites of the law. We learn, from what took place at Antioch,‡ how early this source of uneasiness and danger began to be discovered. The authority of the apostles, assembled in council, was

* Gal. ii. 4.

† Eusebius, t. i. lib. iii. c. xxxii. Routh. Reliquiæ Sacræ, t. i. p. 199.

‡ Acts xv.

sufficient to suppress the evil for a time ; but that it soon exhibited itself again in other quarters, is clearly shown by the fervid declarations of St. Paul, so often repeated, though in different words :—" Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law : ye are fallen from grace."* " I have confidence in you through the Lord, that you will be none otherwise minded : but he that troubleth you, shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be." " As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law, but desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

It might have been hoped that the clear and forcible manner in which the apostle set forth the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and described the nature of evangelical righteousness, would have silenced the disputes which threatened so much evil to the church. But the Christians of Palestine adhered, with increasing pertinacity, to their old legal rites and customs ; and though the generality of them did not intend thereby to throw any doubt upon the sufficiency of Christ's merits, they unintentionally aided the cause of those enemies of the cross whom St. Paul met with among the Gentiles.

The unsettled state of Judæa, and the surrounding districts, tended still further to promote the growth of erroneous views among those who remained in the country till the approach of the Roman armies. We accordingly

* Gal. v. vi.

find, that soon after the fall of Jerusalem, a large proportion of the converts from Judaism formed a community separated by many barriers from other Christian churches. In the course of a few more years it had either dwindled into insignificance, or assumed the melancholy form of a sect distinguished by the worst of errors. That gloomy system, known at the beginning of the second century as the heresy of the Cerinthians and of the Ebionites, is commonly believed to have had its origin among the Judaising Christians of Palestine.* According to this perverted creed, St. Peter was set in opposition to St. Paul; and the whole of the Mosaic law, with its temporal institutions and symbolic rites, was represented as no less binding on the Christian than on the Jew. Attending this effort to perpetuate the typical rites of the old covenant, was the more daring and more destructive attempt to lower the miraculous and divine character of some of the leading truths of the gospel. This experiment led to many absurd speculations, and Jesus was represented as one being, and Christ as another—the latter descending from heaven, while the former was the son of Joseph and Mary. To save themselves from the danger of a speedy confutation, the Ebionites refused to receive any other gospel but that according to St. Matthew; and this they carefully abridged to suit their purpose. It may easily be imagined that such fundamental errors in doctrine were not separate from corresponding violations of morality. The Epistles of St. Paul afford distressing proofs that even orthodox believers were not always free from degrading sins; but their offences against the purity of the gospel were for the most part only humbling evidences of some remaining corruption of the heart—

* Eusebius. Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. xxvii. xxviii.

of human infirmity, not willingly allowed, or complacently regarded. Far otherwise was it in the case of those who were now beginning to set themselves up against the pure and simple truth of Christ. Among them the restraints of natural conscience and the rule of holiness were alike disregarded. Polygamy was represented by the Ebionites as both lawful and commendable; and thus, with the earliest corruptions of the gospel, were introduced licentious practices which might render Christianity itself odious in the eyes of an uninquiring heathen.

St. John, whose life upon earth was prolonged beyond that of any other of the apostles, makes frequent allusion to the appearance of bold, unholy speculators among the people whose faith he was so tenderly anxious to preserve. "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."* Again: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."† In his second Epistle, he says, "Many deceivers are entered into the world who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

* 1 John ii. 18, 19.

† 1 John iv. 1, 3.

Look to yourselves that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed : for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”*

The perverters of heavenly truth thus alluded to, are generally supposed to have been the authors of a species of error known afterwards as constituting the system of the Docetæ and Gnostics, by which names the most powerful of those ancient sects were distinguished, who proudly aimed to be wise above that which is written. It is evident, from the language of St. John, that the human nature of Christ, the incarnation, that is, of divinity, was the mystery which startled these haughty reasoners. They could not overcome the conviction left on their minds by the general evidence to the truth of the gospel ; but they were unconverted by its spirit, and, therefore, could not receive its doctrines. Hence they endeavoured to rationalize it after their own weak notions, and to render it acceptable to themselves, and others of like mind, either by denying that the body of Christ was a real body, or by refusing to acknowledge him, as at a somewhat later period, in the glories of his Godhead.

In the Book of Revelation express mention is made of the Nicolaitanes, whose errors and unholiness were so great that it was a praise to the declining church of Ephesus to be engaged in vigorously opposing them. “This thou hast,” said the heavenly voice, “that thou

* 2 John 7, 11.

hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.”* The origin of this sect is involved in much obscurity ; but all the ancient writers who have alluded to it, concur in describing it as setting at nought every principle of evangelical truth and holiness. Some assert that it arose from the undue zeal of Nicolas the deacon, in asserting the perfect liberty of Christians as to any rule but that which they conceive to exist in the spirit. Others seem to represent him as having perverted the precept of crucifying the flesh, so as to induce the belief that even the natural abhorrence attending the violation of social duties ought to be overcome, and that it is necessary to expose even the nearest ties to be broken if we would attain to spiritual perfection. It appears that the incautious expressions of Nicolas were taken advantage of by men of a very different temper to his own ; and that the ardour with which he had striven to uphold the interests of the gospel furnished occasion to corrupt minds to introduce under its name the darkest iniquities.

Unhappily the progress of these heresies was greatly facilitated by a visible decline in the spirituality of many of the Christian communities. We know that this was the case on the best authority. It is impossible that the churches of Asia should have been spoken of by the Lord himself, as they were, had not an awful change taken place in their general condition. The book of Revelation was written about the year 95 or 96,† that is, rather more than sixty years after the first descent of the blessed Spirit, and about thirty after the death of the great Apostle, who had been chiefly instrumental in establishing the gentile churches. In this interval, such had been the force with which deadening and perverting influences

* Rev. ii. 6. † Lardner, Works, vol. vi. 633.

had wrought even in the church of Ephesus, that it was accused of having left its "first love," and of being in a fallen state, so that an immediate repentance was needed to save it from the fate so solemnly announced, "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." From the case of the Ephesians, and others spoken of in corresponding terms, we may judge of the condition of the church in general. The loftier feeling of devotion had evidently, in numerous instances, yielded to various antagonists. In some, it is probable, the idea of Christian obligation was, from the first, low and imperfect, and it required only a short time to overthrow the structure of faith built on the foundation of a passing enthusiasm. In others, the overpowering influence of worldly associations, the entanglements of business and pleasure, fears, hopes and wishes, friendships and enmities, in numberless varieties, would furnish reasons, if not for the rejection of the gospel, yet for the surrender of that high position in which the unreserved sacrifice of the heart to Christ may be supposed to place his more faithful worshipper.

It is the duty, no less of the religious than of the inquiring mind, to consider the actual state of things in the church at different periods. On the one side it is guarded thereby from the surprise and discouragement to which it is otherwise liable when assailed by the infidel ; and on the other, it is taught to understand that it is not from times, or seasons, or the particular outward circumstances in which they exist, that churches can confidently look for protection against error or corruption. The apostolic age and apostolic churches bred corruptions of the worst kind. Indisputable proofs exist in the pages of Scripture

itself that such was the case ; and the only relief which a thoughtful mind can obtain when oppressed with so melancholy a retrospect, is this, that the vices of the early Christians, like those of later times, arose from their giving up the gospel for their own conceits ; from their endeavour to engraft what is human upon that which is divine—an error so flagrant that they who but humbly strive to preserve their simplicity and faith may happily hope to escape the evils which it has so often and so fearfully inflicted.

While such was the power of a hostile spirit within the limits of the church, the enemy was preparing to assail it from without, as if resolved not to leave a single refuge-place for the truth which Heaven had so mercifully offered to the world. Rather more than thirty years passed away before the Christians were subject to any general persecution on the part of Rome. The Emperor Nero was the first of the rulers of the world to attack them as a distinct people. It is equally easy to account for the toleration which the church enjoyed during the interval alluded to, and for the violence with which it was afterwards assailed. In the colonies or distant dependencies on Rome, the agents of its power cared little, as in the case of Gallus, or Pilate, or Felix, for the religion of the people over whom they had been placed for the mere purpose of rendering them faithful and submissive tributaries. So long as they would willingly pay their taxes to the publicans, and send the choicest of their youth to fill the ranks of the legions, it but little disturbed the haughty Roman whether there was more or less of reasonableness in their devotions or their faith. It was the well-known principle of the senate and the emperors to allow the nations which they conquered to remain undis-

turbed as to their religion. In Rome itself might be seen the statues and priests of many of the foreign deities, which had been adopted into the ruling mythology out of compliment to the countries from which they were derived. It is even related that 'the Emperor Tiberius, moved by the accounts which he received from Pilate respecting Jesus Christ, wished to admit him among the other deities of Rome, but was prevented by the senate.*

Notwithstanding, however, the toleration of many different religious systems, the Roman government never allowed it to be forgotten that it was but a toleration ; and that it might therefore at any moment be contracted or suspended. Attempts to enlarge the sphere of a foreign creed, or to increase the number of its professors, were ever regarded with severe jealousy ; and no rites could be practised which did not belong to one or other of the religions formally sanctioned by a decree of the senate, and therefore called "lawful religions."†

Hence while, on the one side, the Roman magistrate would be little moved at first by what he imperfectly learnt respecting Christ, yet, on the other, it was impossible that his gospel should continue to be preached, and that a whole people should be raised up acknowledging him for their King, their Saviour, and their God, without arousing the power which had hitherto been found sufficient to keep every other system within the narrowest bounds.

The first persecution which the Christians suffered as a

* Tertullian, Apolog. c. v. xxi.

† Religiones licitæ. Cicero, de Legib. lib. ii. c. 8, and other Roman writers of high authority, speak distinctly against the legality of admitting the worship of strange gods.

distinct people,* was immediately after the burning of Rome in the year 64. By this fearful conflagration the greater part of the vast capital was laid in ruins ; and such was the mad and wanton folly of Nero while the fire was raging, that it was generally believed he had himself caused the calamity. Whether, indeed, it was possible for a human mind to conceive so horrible a project as that of burning a city to form a brilliant spectacle, may well be doubted ; but that which we could not credit of mankind in general, may at least be regarded as possible in the case of a monarch who, it is said, stood on a hill while his capital was in flames, and while tens of thousands of his people were being reduced to hopeless poverty, and amused himself with appearing in the garb of an actor, and singing verses descriptive of the fall of Troy.

Much was done both by Nero himself and the senate to provide for the multitudes rendered houseless by the conflagration. But the belief gained ground that the emperor was the author of the calamity. Tyrant as he was, he trembled at the consequences of such a report, and his wicked ingenuity was immediately employed to invent some method of averting the suspicion from himself and fixing it on others. The Christians, already hateful to the mass of the people, presented him with the necessary substitutes. He instantly caused it to be proclaimed that they were the authors of the fire ; and to persuade the people to receive this monstrous calumny, he reminded them how their gods and their festivals, and everything

* They had been expelled by Claudius when he banished the Jews from Rome : but this was owing to their being regarded at that time as a mere Jewish sect.—*Suetonius Claud. c. 25.*

which was sacred in their eyes, had been long treated with contempt by these new Atheists.

But he employed a further argument to impress the deluded multitude with the belief that the Christians were guilty. He treated them as such ; and directing large numbers of those who were best known to be apprehended, he subjected them to the most horrible tortures that his cruelty could invent. We have indisputable testimony to the barbarity of his conduct in the annals of the historian Tacitus. After describing the efforts which the tyrant made to deceive the people, by sacrifices to the gods and by other religious formalities, he adds, " For the purpose of silencing the rumour against him, he inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men who, hated for their infamous vices, were commonly called Christians. The author of this sect, Jesus Christ, was put to death by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Repressed for a time, this destructive superstition again burst forth, not only in Judæa, where the evil had its origin, but in that city where all things which are base and detestable flow together and are cherished. Some of the party having been seized, their confessions led to the apprehension of a vast multitude of others, who were convicted, not indeed of the crime of burning the city, but of hatred to the human race. And mockery was added to their tortures ; for some of them, wrapped up in the skins of wild beasts, were worried to death by dogs : others were affixed to crosses : and some prepared as torches, were set fire to in the evening, and left to burn through the night. Nero opened his gardens for the spectacle which was to be illuminated by these awful flames, and clad as a charioteer, and standing aloft, drove round the circus crowded by wondering multitudes."

Natural horror was too powerful for religious hatred in such a case, for the historian adds, "That much as the Christians deserved punishment, the people now pitied them, feeling that they were suffering not so much for the public good, as to satisfy the vengeance of one wretched tyrant."*

It is evident, from the mode in which Tacitus speaks of the Christians, that he had taken no pains to inquire into their real character. The naked testimony, therefore, which he affords to the fact, that they were exposed to the most frightful persecutions as Christians, is the more free from suspicion ; nor ought it to be passed over lightly, that the only crime which could be alleged against them was a supposed hatred to the human race ; which imaginary guilt, it is easy to understand, arose from no other cause than their extreme caution not to join with the rest of the world in their licentious pleasures or idolatrous worship.

We have no means of determining what number of Christians perished in this persecution ; but the expression of the historian, "a vast multitude," will not allow us to suppose that only the more conspicuous of the faithful were sacrificed. Nor did Nero cease with the first pretended occasion for his cruelty to persecute the church ; and among those who were soon after called upon

* *Annals*. lib. xv. c. xlv. So also another historian : *Suetonius*, Nero, c. xvi. And the poet *Juvenal*, who, alluding to the punishment of the Christians, says :—

" If into rogues omnipotent you rake,
Death is your doom, impailed upon a stake :
Smeared o'er with wax, and set on fire to light
The streets, and make a dreadful blaze by night."

DRYDEN'S TRANS.

to glorify their Heavenly Master by martyrdom, were St. Peter and St. Paul.

The former of these holy men had been long marked out, 'it appears, as a fit subject for the tyrant's vengeance. Some curious, though doubtful, records exist in the ancient writers respecting his death. "While the fatal stroke," it is said, "was daily expected, the Christians in Rome did, by daily prayers and importunities, solicit St. Peter to make his escape, and to reserve himself to the uses and services of the church. This at first he rejected, as what would ill reflect upon his courage and constancy, and argue him to be afraid of those sufferings for Christ to which he himself had so often persuaded others. But the prayers and tears of the people overcame him, and made him yield. Accordingly the next night, having prayed with, and taken his farewell of the brethren, he got over the wall of the prison ; (that is, the Mamertine, to which he had been committed ;) and coming to the city gate, he is there said to have met with our Lord, who was just entering into the city. Peter asked him, 'Lord, whither art thou going ?' From whom he presently received this answer—'I am come to Rome to be crucified a second time.' By which answer Peter apprehended himself to be reprov'd, and that our Lord meant it of his death, that he was to be crucified in his servant. Whereupon he went back to the prison, and delivered himself into the hands of his keepers, showing himself most ready and cheerful to acquiesce in the will of God. Having saluted his brethren, and especially having taken his last farewell of St. Paul, he was brought out of the prison, and led to the top of the Vatican Mount, near the Tiber, the place designed for his execution. The death he was adjudged to was crucifixion, as of all others accounted

the most shameful, so the most severe and terrible. But he entreated the favour of the officers that he might not be crucified in the ordinary way, but might suffer with his head downwards, and his feet up to heaven ; affirming that he was unworthy to suffer in the same posture wherein his Lord had suffered before him.”*

It is generally supposed that St. Paul employed the interval between his first and second imprisonment at Rome in carrying into execution his long-formed purpose of visiting Spain.† Some writers contend that he also visited Britain in the course of this journey, and that the remote West is no less indebted to him than the countries of Asia Minor for the planting of the gospel. However this may be, he returned to Rome in time to be a partaker in the sufferings of his fellow-believers. Whether he was put to death in the same year as St. Peter is matter of doubt ; but the common tradition reports that the apostles suffered together, except that St. Paul, being a Roman citizen, was not crucified, but beheaded.

The persecution which cost the church so many of its most faithful servants, not being supported by regular decrees of the state, appears to have gradually ceased, and the Christians were left to select from such holy men as remained to them fitting successors of those whom they had lost. Linus, Clement, and Anacletus, are each of them spoken of as being placed at the head of the Roman church immediately after the martyrdom of the apostles. Some uncertainty exists as to the exact order of this succession ; but it is agreed that these were the first three bishops of the Roman church when it had ceased to be governed by St. Peter and St. Paul. St. Linus is spoken of, in the Second Epistle to Timothy,‡ as one of

* Cave : Lives of the Apostles. † Rom. xv. 24, 28. ‡ Chap. iv. 21.

the faithful companions of the apostle, in his last days ; and St. Clement is more particularly alluded to in the Epistle to the Philippians, as of the number of those "whose names are in the book of life."

It is to Clement that we are "indebted for the most valuable of the writings, not forming a part of Scripture, handed down to us from those early days. The church of Corinth had fallen into grievous disorder. Its ministers were striving among each other for the highest places and largest gains. Truth and holiness were alike endangered by the factions thus created ; and the hearts of faithful men were wounded to the quick by the melancholy spectacle now presented by a church, which the blessed Paul had called the Church of God. It was in vain that the devout and prudent members of the community exhorted their contentious brethren to cultivate a better spirit. They found their voices drowned in the clamour of rival parties. In this state of things they turned their eyes to Rome, and entreated the well-known and holy Clement to aid them in their distresses. The answer to this appeal still exists, and forms what is termed the First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. No document can afford more important help to the understanding of the temper of the times. On the one hand, it shows how rapidly all the evils attending worldliness and ambition were invading the church ; and, on the other, how mighty was the spirit to resist them in the hearts of the real people of God—of those to whom the gospel had come, not only in word, but with power.

Some doubt exists as to whether Clement was actually bishop of Rome, at the time of his writing this epistle, or only a presbyter. Whichever he was, he must have been highly esteemed, and his address was plainly to be considered

as that, not of an individual, but of a people, speaking by a representative in whose virtues and responsibility they placed entire confidence. Thus the heading of the letter is, "The Church of God which is at Rome to the Church of God which is at Corinth, elect, sanctified by the will of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord : grace and peace from the Almighty God, by Jesus Christ, be multiplied unto you." The writer then proceeds :—

"Brethren : The sudden and unexpected dangers and calamities* that have fallen upon us have, we fear, made us the more slow in our consideration of those things which you required of us ; as also of that wicked and detestable sedition, so unbecoming the elect of God, which a few ready and self-willed men have fomented to such a degree of madness, that your venerable and renowned name, so worthy of all men to be beloved, is greatly blasphemed thereby. For who that has ever been among you has not perceived the firmness of your faith, and its fruitfulness in all good works, and admired the temper and moderation of your religion in Christ, and published abroad the magnificence of your hospitality, and thought you happy in your perfect and certain knowledge of the gospel ? For ye did all things without respect of persons, and walked according to the laws of God ; being subject to those who had the rule over you, and giving the honour that was fitting to such as were the aged among you. Ye commanded the young men to think those things that were modest and grave. The women ye exhorted to do all things with an unblameable and seemly and pure conscience, loving their own husbands as was fitting ; and that, keeping themselves within the bounds of a due-

* This is said in allusion to the late persecution at Rome.

obedience, they should order their house gravely, with all discretion.

“Ye were all of you humble-minded, not boasting of any thing: desiring rather to be subject than to govern, to give than to receive; being content with the portion God had dispensed to you; and hearkening diligently to his word, ye were enlarged in your hearts, having his sufferings always before your eyes. Thus a firm and blessed and profitable peace was given unto you; and an insatiable desire of doing good, and a plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost was upon you all. And being full of good designs, ye did, with great readiness of mind, and with a religious confidence, stretch forth your hands to God Almighty, beseeching him to be merciful unto you, if in any thing ye had unwittingly sinned against him. Ye contended day and night for the whole brotherhood, that with compassion and a good conscience, the number of his elect might be saved. Ye were sincere and without offence towards each other, not mindful of injuries. All sedition and schism was an abomination unto you. Ye bewailed every one his neighbour's sins, esteeming his defects your own. Ye were kind one to another without grudging, being ready to every good work: and being adorned with a conversation altogether virtuous and religious, ye did all things in the fear of God, whose commandments were written upon the table of your hearts.”

How sad was the change produced by the abuse of the prosperity, the honour and enlargement, bestowed upon this flourishing church! “From hence,” says St. Clement, “came emulation and envy, and strife and sedition, persecution and disorder, fear and captivity. So they who were of no renown lifted up themselves against the honourable; those of no reputation against those that

were in respect : the foolish against the wise, the young men against the aged. Therefore righteousness and peace are departed from you, because every one hath forsaken the fear of God, and is grown blind in his faith, nor walketh by the rule of God's commandments, nor liveth as is fitting in Christ ; but every one followeth his own wicked lusts, having taken up an unjust and wicked envy, by which death first entered into the world."

After quoting numerous examples from both the Old and New Testaments in proof of this last assertion, the venerable writer continues :—" These things, beloved, we write unto you, not only for your instruction, but also for your own remembrance ; for we are all in the same lists, and the same comfort is prepared for us all. Wherefore let us lay aside all vain and empty cares, and let us come up to the glorious and sacred rule of our holy calling. Let us consider what is good, and acceptable, and well-pleasing in the sight of him that made us. Let us look steadfastly to the blood of Christ, and see how precious his blood is in the sight of God, which, being shed for our salvation, has obtained the grace of repentance for all the world. Let us search into all the ages that have gone before us ; and let us learn that our Lord has in every one of them still given place for repentance to all such as would turn to him. Noah preached repentance ; and as many as hearkened to him were saved. Jonah denounced destruction against the Ninevites ; howbeit they, repenting of their sins, appeased God by their prayers, and were saved, though they were strangers to the covenant of God.

" Hence we find how all the ministers of the grace of God have spoken, by the Holy Spirit, of repentance. And even the Lord of all has himself declared with an oath

concerning it : ‘ As I live, saith the Lord, I desire not the death of a sinner, but that he should repent.’ Adding further this good sentence, saying, ‘ Turn from your iniquity, O house of Israel. Say unto the children of my people, though your sins should reach from earth to heaven, and though they should be redder than scarlet, and blacker than sackcloth, yet, if ye shall turn to me with all your heart, and shall call me Father, I will hearken to you as to a holy people.’ And in another place he saith on this wise : ‘ Wash ye, make you clean : put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes : cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord : Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow : though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land ; but, if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.’ These things has God established by his Almighty will, desiring that all his beloved should come to repentance.”

Having cited many instances of obedience recorded in the Scriptures, and urged therefrom the necessity of the practice of all holy virtues, he continues : “ Let us then lay hold of his blessing, and let us consider what are the ways by which we may attain unto it. Let us look back upon those things that have happened from the beginning. For what was our father Abraham blessed ? Was it not because that, through faith, he wrought righteousness and truth ? Isaac being fully persuaded of what he knew was to come, cheerfully yielded himself up a sacrifice. Jacob, with humility, departed out of his own country,

fleeing from his brother, and went unto Laban, and served him. And so the sceptre of the twelve tribes of Israel was given unto him. Now what the greatness of this gift was will plainly appear, if we shall take the pains distinctly to consider all the parts of it : for from him came the priests and Levites, who all ministered at the altar of God ; from him came our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the flesh : from him came the kings, and princes, and rulers in Judah ; nor were the rest of his tribes in any small glory, God having promised that, ‘ thy seed shall be as the stars of Heaven.’ They were all, therefore, greatly glorified, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness that they themselves wrought, but through his will. And we also, being called by the same will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, neither by our own wisdom, or knowledge, or piety, or the works which we have done in the holiness of our hearts ; but by that faith by which God Almighty has justified all men from the beginning : to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*

The importance of the concluding clause in this passage will be easily understood by those who are familiar with the controversies of a later age respecting the great doctrine of justification by faith. St. Clement was the scholar and companion of St. Paul ; but it was not with St. Paul alone that he conversed on the mysteries of the gospel. He was no less familiar with St. Peter ; and from the lips of this first of the primitive expounders of Christ’s doctrine, we hear that we ‘ are not justified by ourselves, neither by our own wisdom, or knowledge, or piety, or the works which we have done in the holiness of our hearts, but by that faith by which God Almighty has

* Sec. xxxii.

justified all men from the beginning.' Nothing clearer surely can be needed to prove what was the belief of the church at Rome in those early times respecting justification; nor, on the other hand, can we want any better evidence to establish the worth of those writings, which have been so mercifully preserved, to show us what were the real constituents of the Christian creed as adopted by the disciples of apostles and evangelists.

But St. Clement was no less anxious than St. James to guard believers against trusting to a faith without life, and therefore without fruitfulness. Thus he exclaims : " What then shall we do, brethren ? Shall we be slothful in well doing, and lay aside our charity ? God forbid that any such thing should be done by us ! But rather let us hasten, with all earnestness and readiness of mind, to perfect every good work, for even the Creator and Lord of all things rejoices in his own works."* And, " How blessed and wonderful, beloved, are the gifts of God ! life in immortality ; brightness in righteousness ; truth in full assurance ; faith in confidence ; temperance in holiness ! And all this has God subjected to our understandings. What, therefore, shall those things be which he has prepared for them that wait for him ? The Creator and Father of Spirits, the Most Holy, he only knows both the greatness and the beauty of them. Let us therefore strive with all earnestness, that we may be found in the number of those that wait for him ; that so we may receive the reward which he has promised. But how, beloved, shall we do this ? We must fix our minds by faith towards God, and seek those things that are pleasing and acceptable unto him. We must act conformably to his holy will, and follow the way of truth, casting off from us all

* Sec. xxxiii.

unrighteousness and iniquity, together with all covetousness, strife, evil manners, deceit, whispering, detractions ; all hatred of God, pride and boasting, vain glory and ambition ; for they that do these things are odious to God ; and not only they that do them, but also ' all such as approve of them that do them.' ”*

“ This is the way, beloved, in which we may find our Saviour, even Jesus Christ, the high-priest of all our offerings, the defender and helper of our weakness. By him we look up to the highest heavens, and behold as in a glass his spotless and most excellent visage. By him are the eyes of our hearts opened ; by him our foolish and darkened understanding rejoiceth to behold his wonderful light. By him would God have us to taste the knowledge of immortality, ' who being the brightness of his glory, is by so much greater than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they'....

“ Let us, therefore, march on, men and brethren, with all earnestness in his holy laws. Let us consider those who fight under our earthly governors. How orderly, how readily, and with what exact obedience, they perform those things that are commanded them ! All are not generals, nor colonels, nor captains, nor officers, but every one in his respective rank does what is commanded him by the king, and those who have the authority over him. They who are great cannot subsist without those that are little, nor the little without the great. But there must be a mixture in all things ; and then there will be use and profit too. Let us, for example, take our body. The head without the feet is nothing, neither the feet without the head : and even the smallest members of the body are both necessary and useful to the whole body. All con-

* Sec. xxxv.

spire together, and are subject to one common use, namely, the preservation of the whole body. Let, therefore, our whole body be saved in Jesus Christ ; and let every one be subject to his neighbour according to the order in which he is placed by the gift of God. Let not the strong man despise the weak ; and let the weak see that he reverence the strong. Let the rich man distribute to the necessity of the poor, and let the poor bless God that he has given unto him by whom his want may be supplied. Let the wise man show forth his wisdom, not in words, but in good works. Let him that is humble not bear witness to himself, but let him leave it to another to bear witness of him. Let him that is pure, not grow proud of it, knowing that it was from another that he received the gift of continence. Let us consider, therefore, brethren, whereof we are made : who and what kind of men we came into the world, as it were out of a sepulchre, and from utter darkness. He that made us, and formed us, brought us into his own world, having prepared for us his benefits even before we were born. Wherefore having received all these things from him, we ought, in all respects, to give thanks unto him : to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen !”*

Having insisted still further on the folly of those who pretend to be pure before the Lord, or blameless in their works, he proceeds—“ Seeing then these things are manifest unto us, it will behove us to take care that, looking into the depths of the Divine knowledge, we do all things in order whatsoever our Lord has commanded us to do : and, particularly, that we perform our offerings and service to God at their appointed seasons : for these he has commanded to be done, not by chance, and disorderly, but

* Sec. xxxviii.

at certain determinate times and hours ; and therefore he has ordained, by his supreme will and authority, both where and by what persons they are to be performed, that so all things being piously done unto well-pleasing, they may be acceptable unto him.”*

Illustrating his meaning respecting the services and ministers of the church, by an allusion to those of the temple and under the law, he observes, that as the apostles were sent by Christ, so the apostles, preaching through various countries, appointed the first fruits of their conversions to be overseers and ministers over such as should afterwards believe ; having first, by the Holy Spirit, proved those whom they so ordained.† Further on, he says, “It is a shame, my beloved, yea, a very great shame, and unworthy of your Christian profession, to hear that the most firm and ancient church of the Corinthians should, by one or two persons, be led into a sedition against its presbyters. And this report is come, not only to us, but to those also who differ from us : insomuch that the name of the Lord is blasphemed through your folly, and even ye yourselves are brought into danger by it. Let us, therefore, with all haste, put an end to this sedition : and let us fall down before the Lord, and beseech him with tears, that he would become favourable unto us, and restore us to a seemly and holy course of brotherly love. For this is the gate of righteousness opening unto life : as it is written, ‘Open unto me the gates of righteousness : I will go in unto them, and will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord : the righteous shall enter into it.’ Although, therefore, many gates are opened, yet this gate

* Sec. xl.

† See this subject more fully treated in the Author's Essay, entitled, “The Church and its Ministers.”

of righteousness is that gate in Christ at which blessed are all they that enter in, and direct their way in holiness and righteousness, doing all things without disorder. Let a man be faithful ; let him be powerful in the utterance of knowledge ; let him be wise in making an exact judgment of words ; let him be pure in all his actions ; but still by how much the more he seems to be above others by reason of these things, by so much the more will it behove him to be humble-minded, and to seek what is profitable to all men, and not his own advantage. He that has the love that is in Christ, let him keep the commandments of Christ. For who is able to express the obligation of the love of God ? What man is sufficient to declare, as is fitting, the excellency of its beauty ? The height to which charity* leads is inexpressible. Charity unites us to God ; ‘charity covers the multitude of sins : charity endures all things ;’ is long-suffering in all things. There is nothing base and sordid in charity : charity lifts not itself up above others : admits of no divisions : is not seditious, but does all things in peace and concord. By charity were all the elect of God made perfect : without it, nothing is pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. Through charity did the Lord join us unto himself ; whilst, for the love that he bore towards us, our Lord Jesus Christ gave his own blood for us, by the will of God ; his flesh for our flesh ; his soul for our souls.”

And in conclusion : “Do ye, therefore, who laid the first foundation of this sedition, submit yourselves unto your presbyters ; and be instructed unto repentance, bending the knees of your hearts. Learn to be subject,

* That is, the Christian grace of *love*, which is to be understood by the word *charity*, both in this passage and in that of St. Paul’s own account of it in 1 Cor. xiii.

laying aside all proud and arrogant boasting of your tongues ; for it is better for you to be found little, and approved in the sheepfold of Christ, than to seem to yourselves better than others, and be cast out of his fold.”* Now God, the inspector of all things, the Father of spirits, and the Lord of all flesh, who hath chosen our Lord Jesus Christ, and us by him to be his peculiar people, grant to every soul of man that calleth upon his glorious and holy name, faith, fear, peace, long-suffering, patience, temperance, holiness, and sobriety, unto all well-pleasing in his sight ; through our high-priest and protector, Jesus Christ, by whom be glory and majesty and power and honour unto Him now and for evermore. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and with all that are anywhere called by God through him.”†

* Sec. xlvii. xlix.

† Sec. lvii. lviii. lx.

CHAPTER II.

PERSECUTIONS UNDER DOMITIAN AND TRAJAN—PLINY'S LETTER TO TRAJAN—ST. IGNATIUS—HIS EPISTLES AND MARTYRDOM.

FROM the portions of St. Clement's Epistle given in the preceding chapter, it is easy to discover how powerfully the spirit of the gospel was working on some minds, while in others its blessed influences were resisted by the turbulence of pride and selfishness in their rudest forms. Whether Clement was bishop of Rome when he wrote to the Corinthians is matter of controversy ; but it is generally agreed that, if not, he was soon after raised to the chief station in that most important of the then existing churches. Indications, however, are discovered in history that even the community which enjoyed the teaching and prayers of the apostles themselves, and of apostolic men, like Clement, did not long retain its consistency ; for while some authors merely say that he died a martyr, in the reign of Trajan, others state that, after having exercised the office of bishop ten or eleven years, he found himself constrained to resign his station, as the only means of saving his church from schism, and promoting the interests of that charity which was to him infinitely dearer than all besides. If he lived, as it is said, to the close of the first century, he witnessed a second persecution of the church, under the emperor Domitian, and a third in the reign of Trajan. It was during the former of these persecutions that St. John, according to ancient writers of

great credit and piety, was carried from Ephesus to Rome, and subjected to a species of torture, the very mention of which shows the barbarous character of the times, and the terrors to which the Christians were exposed. The authors referred to state that the apostle was cast into a huge vessel of boiling oil, placed near the Latin gate of the city ; and that on being drawn out he was found to have suffered no injury from the intended torture.* He was not suffered to return to Ephesus, but was banished to Patmos, a little barren island in the Archipelago, and where, in the midst of solitude, he enjoyed the awful delights of a new communion with his glorified master, being allowed, poor and obscure as he seemed, to hold converse with the King of Heaven, while utterly despised by the haughty rulers of the world.

The fears of Domitian induced him to make every effort to discover the leaders of the Christians. While pursuing these inquiries, he heard that some of the relations of Christ were still living, and he was easily induced to believe that the sovereignty mysteriously spoken of as established by the gospel, might soon be claimed or asserted by the living representatives of its author. Agents were not wanting to aid the emperor in his wish to bring these dreaded rivals of his power before him. Great was his astonishment on seeing them enter the palace to find that they had the appearance not of haughty and aspiring chiefs, but of poor and humble peasants. To his question whether they were of the royal race of David, they answered that they were : but when he further inquired what their wealth and possessions were, they replied that

* Tertullian, *De Ræscript. Hæretic.* c. 36. Jerome in *Catal.* c. 9.

they had a few acres of land,* which they cultivated by their own labour, and the produce of which was their sole support. "But what are the reports then which I hear respecting the kingdom of Christ," continued the emperor. "That kingdom is not of this world : it is spiritual and heavenly," was the reply ; and Domitian listening to this account as that of mere visionaries and fanatics, and beholding at the same time the humble appearance of the men before him, and their hands made rough and hard with toil, questioned them no further, but ordered that they should be set at liberty, and allowed to depart unmolested.

It was not thus mercifully that the tyrant treated his own relative, the virtuous and amiable Flavius Clement, who, having become a sincere convert to the gospel, was accused of associating with the seditious Jews, hated at that time even more than the Christians. Flavius had only just retired from the consulship when this accusation was brought against him, and he was now living with his wife and children in the happy tranquillity of his country villa. "The very simplicity and retiredness of his habits rendered him hateful in the sight of Domitian's courtiers ; and his destruction being agreed on, he was soon after barbarously put to death, while his wife Domitilla was sent into distant banishment.

Domitian fell by the hand of an assassin. That assassin, unhappily, was the freedman of Domitilla, who has been suspected of having urged him to avenge her own and her husband's injuries, by a deed which renders it

* Valued, they said, at 9000 denarii, that is, about three hundred pounds of our money.

doubtful whether she had ever really adopted the Christian faith.

The accession of Nerva, a wise and amiable prince, gave some repose to the church ; but his successor, Trajan, no less enlightened and humane in his general policy, adopted measures with regard to the Christians, which delivered them indeed from the outbreaks of mere popular vengeance, but subjected them to a legal and systematic oppression. At the beginning of his reign, a decree was issued forbidding secret assemblies, which, though it does not appear to have been exclusively directed against the Christians, exposed them, more than any other set of people, to cruel and sanguinary treatment. Many of those who had returned from banishment in the time of Nerva were now executed ; and Flavia Domitilla was burnt to death in her own apartment with two young women, her attendants. Her other domestics were murdered with equal barbarity ; and in every part of the empire the late decree seems to have excited similar proceedings against the hated and suspected Christians.

A document still exists which affords at the same time a striking proof of the holiness and purity which characterised the generality of believers at this period, and of the injustice with which even the most enlightened of the heathen were prepared to treat them. Pliny the younger, celebrated for his writings, and beloved by the emperor for his learning and genius, had been appointed to the government of Bythinia. In this province, consisting of one of the most populous portions of Asia Minor, the gospel was still preached and revered with a fidelity becoming those who had first received it from St. Peter. Pliny beheld with astonishment and alarm the inroads which the new religion had made on the ancient domains

of heathenism. He recognised in the progress of Christianity a movement towards change and revolution, which to a mind not instructed in the nature and purposes of the gospel, must have been full of perplexities and terror. He felt it his duty to raise some barrier to the incoming tide of new opinions ; but he knew not how to proceed ; and in his anxiety he wrote to Trajan the letter referred to, and which has ever been considered one of the most valuable relics of antiquity.

“ It is my constant custom, Sire, to refer myself to you in all matters concerning which I have any doubt. For who can better direct me where I hesitate, or instruct me where I am ignorant ? I have never been present at any trial of Christians ; so that I know not well what is the subject matter of punishment or of inquiry, or what strictness ought to be used in either. Nor have I been a little perplexed to determine whether any difference ought to be made upon account of age, or whether the young and tender, and the full grown and robust, ought to be treated all alike : whether repentance should entitle to pardon, or whether all who have once been Christians ought to be punished though they be no longer so : whether the name itself, although no crimes be detected, or crimes only belonging to the name, ought to be punished. Concerning all these things I am in doubt.

“ In the mean time, I have taken this course with all who have been brought before me, and have been accused as Christians. I have put the question to them, whether they were Christians. Upon their confessing to me that they were, I repeated the question a second and a third time, threatening also to punish them with death. Such as still persisted I ordered away to be punished, for I did not doubt that, whatever might be the nature of their

belief, contumacy and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished. There were others similarly infatuated, whom, because they are Romans, I have noted down to be sent to the city.

“ In a short time, the crime diffusing itself, even whilst under persecution, as is usual in such cases, divers sorts of people came in my way. A written information was brought me, but without the name of the author, containing the names of many persons, who, upon examination, denied that they were Christians, or had ever been so : who repeated after me an invocation to the gods, and with wine and frankincense made supplication to your image, which for that purpose I had caused to be brought and set before them, together with the statues of the deities. Moreover, they reviled the name of Christ. None of which things, it is said, those who are truly Christians can be compelled to do. These, therefore, I thought proper to dismiss.

“ Others were named by an informer, who at first confessed themselves Christians, and afterwards denied it. Some said that they had been Christians, but had ceased to be so : some three years ago, some longer, and one or more above twenty years. They all worshipped your image, and the statues of the gods, and also reviled Christ. They affirmed that the whole of their fault or error lay in this ; that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ, as a god, and that they bound themselves by an oath, not indeed to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery ; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them when called upon to return it : that when these things had been performed,

it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a meal, which they ate in common, without any disorder ; but which they had ceased to do after my edict, whereby, according to your command, I had forbidden secret societies.

“ After receiving this account I judged it the more necessary to examine, and that by torture, two maid-servants, who were called ministers. But I have discovered nothing, beside a bad and excessive superstition. Suspending, therefore, all judicial proceedings, I have recourse to you for advice : for it has appeared unto me a matter highly deserving consideration, especially on account of the great number of persons who are in danger of suffering. For many of all ages, and every rank, of both sexes likewise, are accused, and will be accused. Nor has the contagion of this superstition seized cities only, but the villages also and the open country. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it may be restrained and corrected. It is certain that the temples, which were almost forsaken, begin to be more frequented ; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are revived. Victims likewise are everywhere bought up, whereas for some time there were few purchasers. From which it is easy to judge what a multitude of men might be reclaimed, if room were given for repentance.”

To this letter the emperor thus replied : “ You have done what you ought, my dear Pliny, in examining the case of those who have been brought before you as Christians ; for it is impossible to establish any one rule that shall hold universally. They are not to be sought for. If they be brought before you, and convicted, they must be punished ; but with this exception, that he who denies himself to be a Christian, and proves that this is the

truth, by offering supplications to our gods, though he be suspected of having been a Christian formerly, let him, on account of his repentance, receive pardon. In no case of accusation ought the writing which contains it to be received without the name of the author; for it would afford a precedent of the worst kind, and be contrary to the character of our age.”*

We learn from these two epistles several important particulars. Thus, it is evident, that the Church of Christ had, even before the end of seventy years after its establishment on the day of Pentecost, become visibly enlarged by the apparent conversion of many whose hearts were never truly devoted to the gospel or its author. Yet these very persons, it is equally clear, had been admitted to partake in all the rites and spiritual privileges of the community, and had continued for several years to confess the doctrines and follow the practices of their Christian brethren. Here there was a manifest fulfilment of our Lord's intimation, that the word of truth would sometimes be like seed sown in stony places,† for that there would be those who would hear the word, and “anon with joy receive it,” but who having no root in themselves would endure only for awhile, and would in time of tribulation and persecution be offended and fall away.

So too we discover from the whole tenor of their language, that the only condition on which even the mild Pliny and the generous emperor could be induced to think of saving the Christians from torture was, that they should at once

* See Credibility of the Gospel Hist. chap. ix. Lardner's Works, vol. vii. p. 291.

† St. Matt. xiii. 20.

renounce their religion, and worship not only the gods, but the emperor himself. Let those, we may here observe, who despise the gospel, consider from what a species of slavery that contemned gospel has delivered them. It is, however, most important to the Christian cause, and to the proof of its sanctity, that not a single crime, not even the appearance of moral turpitude, could be alleged against the members of Christ's church. They were guilty, says the heathen, of an excessive superstition. Nothing can be understood by this but that they were, as a people, truly and fervently devoted to the service of their Saviour. For what is the account which Pliny has handed down respecting their religious rites and practices? They bound themselves to commit none of the vices with which the world was then so fearfully overrun : their most mysterious and retired assemblies were engaged in prayer, in singing hymns, and in performing such other acts of devotion as might redound to the glory of Christ. Now, on turning to any of the earliest recognised portions of the New Testament, we shall find that whatever was done in simple homage to the blessed Redeemer, must have been a pure, holy, and thiritual service ; and that, consequently, the inflexible determination of the mass of believers to adhere to their vows, affords a sufficient proof of the general purity of their conduct and principles.

There is also another point to be noticed ; the worship which the Christians rendered to God was evidently of the simplest kind. Had it been otherwise, the heathen would probably have been less suspicious of its character. But there were no statues or images to be discovered in their sacred places. They had nothing in common with paganism, because while the whole system or idolatry,

from beginning to end, required and rendered obedience to the senses, the gospel put men upon the trial and exercise of spiritual strength, and assigned no value to any profession of religion which could not justify and support itself by the energy of a spiritual nature.

The orders issued by Trajan had the effect of discouraging the base practices of secret informers; and they afforded a shelter to those who had no such earnest or sincere love of the gospel as to be ready to suffer on its account. But so far as true Christians were concerned, they effected no actual change. The toleration of the new religion was as distant from the mind of the emperor Trajan as it had been from that of Domitian. He only desired that nothing might be done contrary to the majesty of the Roman laws, and that no more blood might be shed than was necessary to indicate his authority, and to support the honour of the ancient gods.

A memorable proof exists that his prescript was not for the protection of Christ's most venerable and faithful servants.

Among those whose virtues shed lustre over the present period of the church, was St. Ignatius. He is said by some writers to have been the infant whom Jesus took in his arms, and presented to his disciples, when he taught them the necessity of conversion and humility. But this account is not generally received. There is, however, an entire agreement in the statement that he conversed with the apostles, and that St. Peter and St. John were his especial instructors in all the mysteries of heavenly doctrine. After the death of Evodius, who is spoken of as succeeding St. Peter in the government of the church at Antioch, Ignatius was appointed to the bishopric; and in that situation he instructed the numerous people com-

mitted to his charge with a zeal and devotedness corresponding to his deep acquaintance with the gospel. Whilst the persecution under Domitian was raging, he applied himself continually to prayer and fasting. His piety melted the hearts of those who beheld his anxiety for their safety. They regarded him as their friend and father; and their admiration was raised to the highest pitch when they found themselves delivered from perils which they piously believed God averted in answer to the supplications of their pastor.

But the time was drawing nigh when they were to be deprived of the blessings which attended his ministrations. Trajan, on his expedition into the East, passed by Antioch, and during his sojourn there, he was made acquainted with the power which Ignatius exercised as chief of the Christian community. The venerable bishop rather sought than shunned the trial which awaited him. He hoped that, by becoming a sacrifice himself to the wrath of the persecutors, he might save his people from some portion of the impending danger. There was a growing thirst for the blood of Christians; and so strong were the ties of filial love which bound them to their pastors, that the heathen seem to have understood they could not inflict a deeper wound on the whole society than by putting to death such a man as Ignatius.

Regardless of the age and virtues of the saint, Trajan rudely exclaimed, on seeing him enter his presence, "Who art thou, wretched man, that darest to despise my orders, and to lead others as well as thyself to destruction?" Ignatius replied that his name was Theophorus, a title which signified, in allusion to evangelical mysteries, that he bore God in his soul, and which had either been given him by the affection of his people, or assumed by

himself as indicative of his faith in the Divine promises. But the meaning of such an appellation was little likely to be known to the heathen emperor, and he angrily exclaimed, "Who is he who bears God about with him?" Ignatius replied, "He who has Jesus Christ in his heart." "And do you not believe," said Trajan, "that we too bear the gods in our hearts—those gods, that is, which fight with us against our enemies?" "You deceive yourselves," was the answer—"there is but one God. It is He who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is therein: And there is one Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, and it is his kingdom which I seek." "You speak of him," said Trajan, "who was crucified under Pontius Pilate?" "Yes," replied Ignatius, "he it was who crucified both my sin and its author, and who treads the malice of the devil in the dust, so far as they are concerned who bear this Saviour in their hearts."

Surprised again at expressions so strange and difficult of interpretation, Trajan exclaimed, "And do you pretend, then, to carry within you him that was crucified?" Ignatius answered, "Yes! for it is written, 'I will dwell in them and walk in them.'"

The emperor required nothing further; for he almost immediately after proceeded to pass judgment on the venerable man who had thus boldly declared the first great principles of his faith. "We command," said Trajan, "that he who has professed to bear within him the Crucified, be conveyed to Rome under a guard of soldiers, and that he be there devoured by wild beasts, during the public games."

"Blessed be thou, O Lord!" was the exclamation of the martyr on hearing these words. "I thank thee for the love with which thou hast inspired me, and for thy good-

ness in permitting me to bear, like Paul, chains of iron for thy sake." The fetters being immediately put on, he prayed for the church, and especially commended his own portion of it, with many tears, to the Lord.

The first place of importance at which he arrived was the city of Smyrna, where Polycarp, who had been, like himself, a scholar of St. John, was bishop. "Being brought to him," says the ancient account of his martyrdom, "and communicating to him some spiritual gifts, and glorying in his bonds, he entreated, first of all, the whole church (for the churches and cities of Asia attended this holy man by their bishops and priests and deacons, all hastening to him if by any means they might receive some part of his spiritual gift,) but more particularly Polycarp, to contend with God in his behalf; that being speedily taken from the world he might appear before the face of Christ."

But the affection manifested towards him was so great, that he began to fear the zeal of his friends might prevent him from accomplishing the work which he had undertaken to perform. Intelligence reached him that endeavours were being made, by the faithful at Rome, to save him from martyrdom. There was reason to fear that a compromise of principle, or an appearance of timidity might be involved in such attempts. Before leaving Smyrna, therefore, he addressed an epistle to the Roman Christians, and earnestly and pathetically exhorted them to cease from their erring efforts on his behalf. "Forasmuch," says he, "as I have at last obtained, through my prayers to God, to see your faces, which I much desired to do, being bound in Christ Jesus, I hope ere long to salute you, if it shall be the will of God to grant that I may attain unto the end for which I long. For the beginning

is well disposed, if I have but grace, without hindrance, to receive what is appointed for me. But I fear your love lest it do me an injury ; it being easy for you to effect what you please, but hard for me to attain unto God if you spare me.

“I would not,” he continues, “that ye should please men, but God, whom also ye do please. For neither shall I ever hereafter have such an opportunity of going unto God ; nor will you, if ye shall now be silent, ever be entitled to a better work. For if you be silent, I shall be made partaker of God, but if you love my body, I shall have my course again to run. Wherefore ye cannot do me a greater kindness than to suffer me to be sacrificed unto God, now that the altar is already prepared ; that when ye shall form your chorus in the feast of love, ye may sing to the Father in Christ Jesus, praising him that he has vouchsafed a bishop of Syria to be translated from the East to the West ; for good indeed it is to set from the world unto God in order to rise again unto him. . . .

“I write to the churches, and signify to them all, that I am willing to die for God, unless you hinder me. I beseech you to exercise no unseasonable kindness on my behalf. Leave me to become food for the wild beasts, through which I may attain unto God. I am the wheat of God ; and I shall be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may become the pure bread of Christ. Rather encourage the wild beasts, that they may be my sepulchre, and may leave nothing of my body, lest when I fall asleep, I should still be a burden to you. Then shall I be a true disciple of Christ, when the world shall no longer see my body. Supplicate Christ for me that, by these instruments, I may be found a sacrifice to God. I

do not, as Peter and Paul, command you. They were apostles : I am one condemned. They were free : I am even to this moment but a slave. But if I suffer, I too shall be the freed-man of Christ, and shall rise again free in him."

Ignatius was now eighty years old, and the length and ordinary toils of the journey from Antioch to Rome were sufficiently oppressive to a man of his age. But it was not enough that he should be bowed down by the burden of natural weariness and infirmity. His guards became his persecutors. "From Syria to Rome," he says, "I fight with wild beasts, and that both by sea and land, by night and by day. For I am bound to ten leopards, a band, that is, of soldiers, who become worse the more kindly they are treated. But I am the better instructed by their injuries. *Yet am I not hereby justified.** O may I enjoy the wild beasts prepared for me, and which I hope to find ready to devour me ! I will encourage them, that they may the more eagerly do so, and not through fear, as in some cases, leave me untouched. Yea : if they do it not willingly, I will compel them to it. Pardon me, I know what is useful for me. I now begin to be a disciple ; nor shall any thing move me, whether visible or invisible, that I may attain to Christ Jesus. Let fire and the cross ; let the onset of wild beasts ; let the crushing of bones, and tearing of limbs, and rending of the whole body ; yea, let all the wicked torments which the devil can inflict come upon me, only let me attain unto Jesus Christ !

"The boundaries of the earth ; the kingdoms of the world, would profit me nothing. It is better for me to die for Christ, than to reign monarch of the universe. I seek him who died in our stead. I long for him who

* 1 Cor. iv. 4.

ose again for us. He is the wealth laid up for me. Pardon me, my brethren. Hinder me not from entering into life : do not desire to keep me in a state of death ; nor, when I wish to give myself to God, separate me from him by the world and its afflictions. Permit me to receive the pure light. When there, I shall be a man. Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my Lord. If any one possess him in himself, let him know what I wish, and let him compassionate me, understanding how I am straitened.”*

Inpatient to reach Rome in time for the public games, the soldiers hastened to leave Smyrna, and conveyed their prisoner to Troas : “from whence,” says the narrative of his martyrdom, “being brought to Neapolis, he passed by Philippi, through Macedonia, and that part of Epirus which is next to Epidamnus. And having found a ship in one of the sea-ports, he sailed over the Adriatic Sea ; and passing by several islands and cities, at length came over against Puteoli ; which being shown to the holy man, he hastened to go forth, being desirous to walk from thence, along the way traversed by the apostle Paul ; but the violent wind which arose and drove on the ship would not allow of his doing so. Wherefore, commending the love of the brethren in that place, he sailed forward.

“And the wind continuing favourable to us for a day and a night, we indeed unwillingly hurried on, as sorrowing to think of being separated from this holy martyr : but to him it happened entirely according to his wish, that he might go the sooner out of this world, and attain unto the Lord, whom he loved. Wherefore, sailing into the Roman port, and the unholy sports being almost at an end, the soldiers began to be offended at our slowness ; but the bishop, with great joy, complied with their hastiness.

* Epis. to the Romans, sec. v. vi.

“Being, therefore, soon forced away from the port, so called, we forthwith met the brethren, (for the report of what concerned the holy martyr was spread abroad,) who were full of fear and joy. For they rejoiced in that God had vouchsafed them the company of Theophorus, but were afraid when they considered that such an one was brought thither to die. Now some of those who were most zealous for his safety, and who said that they would appease the people, and entreat them not to desire the destruction of the just, he exhorted to hold their peace. And knowing this by the Spirit, and saluting them all, he besought them to show a true love for him, urging his purpose yet more than he had done in his epistle, and persuading them not to envy him who was hastening to the Lord. And so all the brethren kneeling down, he prayed to the Son of God in behalf of the churches, that he would put a stop to the persecutions, and continue the love of the brethren towards each other; which being done, he was, with all haste, led to the amphitheatre, and speedily, according to the command of Cæsar before given, thrown in, the end of the spectacles being at hand. For it was then a very solemn day, called in the Roman tongue, the nineteenth of the Calends of January, upon which the people were more than ordinarily wont to be gathered together.”

Ignatius had expressed his desire, in writing to the Romans, that no portion of his body might remain. He was anxious, he said, that his friends should be spared the trouble of collecting his relics. His wish was accomplished, for only a few fragments of the larger bones were left undevoured by the wild beasts. These were carefully collected by his friends, and sent to Antioch, where they were received by the faithful as a precious memorial of

their departed pastor. St. Chrysostom, in one of his sermons to the people of Antioch, eloquently alludes to this circumstance: *—"God took him from you for a little time, but restored him with greater glory. And as money-lenders receive back their own with interest, so God, taking this treasure for a while that he might exhibit it at Rome, brought it back to you with increased lustre. You sent him forth a bishop: you received him again a martyr: you sent him forth with prayers: you received him again with crowns."

Some doubt has been entertained respecting the authenticity of the concluding sections of the document, entitled, "The Martyrdom of St. Ignatius." But however received, they tend to show how deep and intense a feeling possessed the hearts of those who contemplated the deaths of the early saints. The narrative purports to be that of eye-witnesses; and the writers say, "We watched through all the night, and with much bending of the knees and prayer, besought the Lord to strengthen us in our weakness respecting that which had been done. At length, falling into a slight slumber, some of our party suddenly beheld Ignatius standing near, and embracing us: others saw the blessed one looking as a man coming from heavy labour, and standing by the Lord with much confidence, and in ineffable glory. Filled with joy at beholding these things, glorifying God, the giver of all good, and blessing the saint, we have made known to you the day and hour, in order that, assembling together at the time of the martyrdom, we may

* *Martyrium S. Ignat. Cotelerius*, t. ii. p. 176.

In the first instance, the few remains of the martyr were buried in the cemetery near Antioch; but they were removed in a subsequent age, by order of the emperor Theodosius, and placed in a church dedicated to his memory.—*Evagrius Hist. Eccles.* lib. i. c. xvi.

communicate with this wrestler and martyr of Christ, who beat down the devil, and trampled his snares beneath his feet ; glorifying, through his venerable and holy memory, our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom and with whom be glory and power to the Father, with the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, for ever and ever. Amen !”

Several points illustrative of the state of the church in these times are observable in the above narrative. It strikingly proves the ardent affection which prevailed among those who had a just title to the name of Christians. It shows how intimate a relation, and how frequent and close an intercourse, existed between the several members or branches of the universal church : and it further indicates the existence of several orders of ministers in the church, for it says that Ignatius, after saluting Polycarp, addressed in a similar manner the other bishops, and the presbyters and deacons, many of whom had come together from the churches and cities of Asia.*

By taking advantage of the epistles of this early and most faithful minister of the gospel, we shall possess still more abundant illustrations of the state of religion in his age. Besides the letter to the Romans, already quoted, he wrote several others ; but of these, only that first named, and six others, are generally allowed to be genuine. The evidence upon which these seven epistles have been received, as the real production of the martyr, is clear and full. There is every reason to believe that they were collected by Polycarp, and the reverence in which their author was universally held renders it highly improbable that they should have suffered any material corruption. If, therefore, we may trust to any ancient document, in our inquiries into the history of past times, the Epistles of Ignatius

* Martyrium S. Ignat. sec. x. Cotel. t. ii. 164.

merit most attentive consideration. They undesignedly set before us the image of the church as it existed at the beginning of the second century ; they let us hear its living voice ; and the moods of thought and the temper of its most influential members become familiar to us through the language in which they were in that early age most commonly expressed.

We have already spoken of the allusions made in the narrative of the martyrdom, to the several orders of ministers existing in the time of Ignatius. Something more than mere allusions occur in his epistles ; and these writings have accordingly been largely quoted in most of the controversies carried on respecting the character and degrees of the Christian clergy. Ignatius lived at a period when the spirit of ambition and disaffection was beginning to exercise its worst powers in the church. Good order, sound discipline, and a ready acquiescence in what the aged, the wise and experienced might suggest, offered the only safeguard against the threatened invasion. Independent of other reasons, we may account by this consideration for the strong language employed by Ignatius and others when speaking of the clergy of those times. They were, for the most part, men who had obtained their position solely through their piety and eminent spiritual experience. They were as remarkable for their courage and fortitude as for their holiness : like the chief Shepherd, they stood prepared to give their lives for the flock ; and they counted no sacrifice too great or dear so that they might carry on the work of the Lord, and glorify his name.

It is not surprising that men of such character should be held in high esteem by those who really understood the

importance of the work in hand. They were contemplated as ministers of God in the highest and most literal sense of the expression. Their wisdom and devotion were ever regarded as the gift of the Blessed Spirit ; their holy heroism as the demonstration of their union with Christ ; and their words and actions as the fruit of a sanctity and consecration which gave them, not the authority of office merely, but that of fathers, beloved of God themselves, and seeking for their children a share in the same blessings, and in the same heavenly heritage.

If this be borne in mind, the expressions employed by Ignatius, and other early writers, will be less startling than they must otherwise appear. In the first instance, they were adopted as the fervent and sincere language of those who felt that they could never too strongly express their love for the servants of God. An additional motive for their use was furnished by the circumstances of the times. When division threatened the communities, hitherto so well ordered and happy, the defence of ministerial authority appeared to many the only means of preserving or restoring tranquillity. The higher the titles given, the more glowing the attributes ascribed to the heads of the church—the more probable it seemed that the people might be kept sensible of their spiritual worth and just claims to obedience.

Unhappily, the modes of expression for the introduction of which we may thus account, lost, in the course of time, their proper use and most significant interpretation. With the decline of primitive holiness, the faithful, loving spirit which spoke, however fervently, with truth and simplicity, gave way to a taste for formal homage ; and the language which had once so much of meaning in it

was applied indiscriminately where not a trace remained of the heavenly virtues which it had originally been intended to describe.

The Epistle which Ignatius addressed to the Ephesians will furnish us with good examples of the points above alluded to. Thus having, in the first section, spoken to them of Onesimus, the then Bishop of Ephesus, as having represented them in his own person, he exhorts them to love and revere him, and to account themselves happy in possessing so good a bishop. He then alludes to Burrhus, whom he designates as his fellow-servant, and their deacon, blessed in all things, and to others eminent among them. "It is fitting, therefore," he continues, "that ye should in every way glorify Jesus Christ, who has thus glorified you; that ye should be fitted together in one subjection, with the same mind and the same counsel, and that ye should all speak the same thing; that being subject to the bishop and the presbytery, ye may be sanctified in all things."*

"I do not order you thus to act, as if I were myself any one; for though I be bound in his name, I am not yet made perfect in Jesus Christ. I have now the beginning of discipleship; and I address you as my united teachers,† seeing that I ought to be as it were anointed for the contest by your faith, admonition, patience, and long suffering. But since love will not permit me to be silent on your behalf, therefore have I undertaken to exhort you to run together in the counsel of God; for Jesus Christ, our inseparable life, is the very counsel of the Father, even as also the bishops appointed to

* Epist. S. Ignat. ad Ephes. sec. ii. Cotelcrius, t. ii. p. 12.

† Jacobson, t. ii. p. 266. n.

the boundaries of the earth, are the counsel of Jesus Christ.

“ Whence it behoves you to run together in the counsel of the bishop even as also ye do. For your presbytery, deservedly renowned and worthy of God, is fitted to the bishop even as the chords are fitted to the lyre. Thus in your concord and symphonious charity Jesus Christ is sung ; and each one of you helps to form the chorus, so that with a common harmony and with one consent, and taking up the melody of God in unity, ye may sing with one voice to the Father, through Jesus Christ, that He may both hear you, and know by what means ye do that which is good, that is, as being members of his Son. Profitable, therefore, is it for you to continue in unblameable unity, that ye may at all times be partakers with God.”*

This is followed by another passage of similar import, and which has ever been regarded as one of the most remarkable in the writings of Ignatius. “ If I, in so short a time, have formed such a close intimacy, not human, indeed, but spiritual, with your bishop, by how much more do I judge you happy, being joined to him even as the church is to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ to the Father, that all things may exist together in unison. Let no man deceive himself. If any one be not within the altar, he is destitute of the bread of life. For if the prayer of one or two has such force, by how much more must that of the bishop and the whole church prevail ! He, therefore, who comes not into the same place with the rest is proud, and condemns himself, for it is written, ‘ God resisteth the proud :’ let us be careful then not to resist the bishop, that so we may be subjected to God.”†

The same epistle contains many doctrinal passages of

* Sec. iv.

† Sec. v.

great interest. In alluding to the heresies which wicked and worldly men were then endeavouring to introduce, Ignatius says, "There is one physician, both fleshly and spiritual, both born and unborn, God incarnate, in mortality true life, of Mary and of God, first capable, and then incapable, of suffering."* And inculcating the grand duty of charity, he adds, "But pray unceasingly for other men. For there is hope of repentance for them, and that they may at length come to God. So regard them then, that at least they may be instructed by your works. To their wrathfulness, oppose your own gentleness; to their boasting, your humility; to their blasphemies, your prayers; to their wanderings, your steadfastness in the faith; to their rudeness, your mildness. Not, that is, striving to imitate their example, but rather endeavouring, by moderation, to prove ourselves their brothers, and the imitators of the Lord."†

Equally beautifully and pathetic is the passage in which, having alluded to the mystery of divine peace, he says, "of which nothing is hidden from you, if ye have perfect faith in Jesus Christ, and love, which are the beginning and the end of life. For the beginning is faith, and the end love. And these two in oneness are of God. And all other things are to be followed for the adorning of holiness. No one confessing the faith sins; no one possessing love hates. The tree is known by its fruit. They who confess themselves Christians, shall be made manifest by their deeds, for if we persevere unto the end, we succeed not by our profession, but by the power of faith."‡

Again: "Do not err, my brethren! They who corrupt houses shall not inherit the kingdom of God. If, therefore, they who do these things according to the flesh

* Sec. vii.

† Sec. x.

‡ Sec. xiv.

die, how much more shall they perish who by false doctrine corrupt the faith of God, for which Christ was crucified? Defiled and base, they and those who hear them shall depart into the fire which never can be quenched.”*

“Let my spirit be regarded even as an offscouring for the cross, which is a stumbling-block to them that disbelieve, but to us salvation and eternal life. For our Lord Jesus Christ was conceived of Mary, according to the dispensation of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Spirit. And was born and baptized, that he might sanctify the water by suffering.”†

The other Epistles of Ignatius are characterised by the same fervent and devout zeal. Like that to the Ephesians, they prove how deeply he was impressed with the desire of preserving the unity of Christ's church, and with the solemn conviction, that the main instrument for effecting this great object was to be found in a well-ordered ministry,‡ whose power should be derived, on the one hand, from the sanctifying graces of the blessed Spirit and of Christ's presence, and, on the other, from the filial love and entire confidence of the people.

But while we learn from these writings what was the outward form of the church, what the nature of its government, and into what classes its ministers were generally divided, we are also made acquainted, it is seen, from the same source, with the all-important fact that, at least up to the period in which Ignatius lived, the fundamental principles of the gospel were carefully set forth as essential to the very life and being of the church. Thus we find that faith and love were both preached as necessary to a

* Sec. xvi.

† Sec. xviii.

‡ Epist. to the Magnesians, sec. vi.

continued state of acceptableness with God, and of actual communion with his people ; and that the divinity of Christ ; his miraculous conception ; the sanctifying power of the blessed Spirit ; and the resurrection to life and glory, were topics so fully understood by the members of the church, that it was sufficient to allude to them merely when zeal or obedience was to be incited to some new and difficult enterprise.

CHAPTER III.

TREATMENT OF THE CHRISTIANS UNDER ADRIAN—APOLOGIES
OF QUADRATUS AND ARISTIDES—GROWTH OF HERESIES—
RENEWAL OF PERSECUTIONS — ST. POLYCARP AND JUSTIN
MARTYR.

A. D.
117. THE emperor Trajan was succeeded by Adrian, who, like his predecessor, enjoyed great reputation for ability and philosophical refinement. But he was a faithful worshipper of the gods, and as such, could not view with very favourable sentiments a religion which taught that the worship which he rendered was the worship of devils. Encouraged by what was generally known of his character and opinions, the populace in various places assailed the Christians with all the fury of religious hatred. False accusations were multiplied against them, and the grossest follies and vices of those who only appealed to the gospel as a cloak for their mischievous heresies, were indiscriminately charged upon the wisest and most virtuous of believers.

Affairs were in this state when Adrian visited the city of Athens, still no less renowned than formerly for the solemnity with which it celebrated the mysteries of Eleusis. To be permitted to take part in these solemn secret rites was the aim of the heathen, panting to attain to a supposed religious perfection. His initiation required at least an imaginary purity of both body and mind. Great was the awfulness of the truths with which he was made acquainted on being admitted to those recesses of

the shrine in which the mysteries were exhibited.* To reveal what he then beheld, was to expose himself to death both present and eternal ; whereas, if he continued to preserve the sanctity with which the rites had invested him, he might hope to ascend by due gradations to the loftiest realms of divinity. Adrian aspired to this eminence, which neither his rank nor his genius could give him without the solemn process of initiation. Through this, therefore, he passed, and the Christians, who had shown no greater reverence for the rites of Eleusis than they had manifested for any other Pagan superstition, naturally expected that their sufferings would be increased with the increase of the emperor's erring devotion.

The dreaded storm was just bursting over their heads, when God inspired the principal man among the Athenian believers with courage to appeal to Adrian's sense of jus-

* " In cultivating," says Bishop Warburton, " the doctrine of a future life, it was taught that the *initiated* should be happier in that state than all other mortals ; that while the souls of the profane, at their leaving the body, stuck fast in mire and filth, and remained in darkness, the souls of the *initiated* winged their flight directly to the happy islands, and the habitation of the gods. This doctrine was as necessary for the support of the *mysteries* as the *mysteries* were for the support of the doctrine. But now, lest it should be mistaken, that *initiation* alone, or any other reasons than a virtuous life, entitled men to this future happiness, the *mysteries* openly proclaimed it as their chief business to restore the soul to its original purity. ' It was the end and design of *initiation*,' says Plato, ' to restore the soul to that state from whence it fell, as from its native seat of perfection.' They contrived that every thing should tend to show the necessity of virtue, as appears from Epictetus : ' thus the *mysteries* become useful : thus we seize the true spirit of them, when we begin to apprehend that every thing therein was instituted by the ancients for instruction and amendment of life.'"—*The Divine Legation of Moses*, b. ii. sec. iv. Works vol. ii. p. 8.

tice and respect for truth. This bold and eloquent advocate of the gospel was Quadratus, commonly regarded as the successor of Publius, who had been made bishop of Athens on the death of Dionysius the Arcopagite. Publius himself had suffered martyrdom in an earlier part of Adrian's reign ; and Quadratus was alike distinguished for the graces of fortitude and resolution, so necessary in those days to enable the chief ministers of the church to perform their duty.

It is said of Quadratus that he was endowed with the gift of prophecy, and he is ranked among those who, both by their miracles and their preaching, were the foremost, in this age, to spread abroad the knowledge of the gospel. We have reason to lament that only a small fragment remains of the *Apology* which Quadratus addressed to Adrian.* An Athenian philosopher, Aristides, a faithful convert to the gospel, presented another at the same time ; but this also has perished ; and we have only the record of history from which to form any notion of the value and excellence of these writings. That their merit was of no ordinary kind it is reasonable to conclude from the influence which they exercised on the emperor's feelings. Happily for the Christians, some preparation had been made for their defence by the proconsul of Asia, Serenius

* Eusebius, Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. 37. and lib. iv. c. 3. St. Jerome says that the work of Quadratus was full of argument and faith ; and that it was worthy of its apostolic doctrine. He adds, that the author stated he had seen many who had been cured by the Lord of various diseases, and others who had risen from the dead—a proof, he says, of his age. Of Aristides he observes, that he retained the garb of a philosopher after he became a Christian, and that his *Apology* was highly esteemed among the learned.—*Lib. de Viris Illustribus.*

Gratianus. By him the injustice of the popular persecutions were clearly described to Adrian ; and we may easily conceive how indignant a virtuous, though a prejudiced, mind, like that of the emperor, must have been at some of the recitals which he then heard. The arguments of Quadratus and Aristides gave all the required force to the statements of Gratianus ; and Adrian issued an edict forbidding the condemnation of Christians from popular report or secret accusations ; adding, that they were only to be punished when found guilty of violating the law, and that they who accused them falsely or maliciously, were themselves to bear the penalty of perjury.

For some few years after this the church enjoyed a degree of tranquillity, which had long been denied it. But fearful indications exist of Adrian's capriciousness, and how uncertain were the proceedings of even the best of the heathen emperors is proved from the fact, that scarcely three years had passed after the publication of his famous edict, when Heron, bishop of Antioch, and successor of Ignatius, suffered martyrdom by his orders. A similar fate attended other believers, who were brought under his observation ; and it is probable, from these instances, that had his zeal for paganism been more frequently and directly confronted with pure and active Christianity, the very semblance of a toleration would have entirely passed away.

But it was not from the rulers of the world only that the disciples of Christ had to endure oppression. The various sects which had, during the preceding age, been gradually acquiring strength, were now sufficiently powerful to appear as rivals of the church. They pretended to the knowledge of truths far more mysterious and sublime

than those preached by the apostles and their followers. No difficulty in the subject, no dread of the consequences of error, daunted the bold, bad minds engaged in this effort to supplant the gospel.

Extravagant, and utterly unworthy of notice, as the heresies of ancient times appear to us now, it ought to be remembered that they were viewed under a very different light when first presented to the world. There was at that time an ambitious desire to bring every thing, the very mysteries of Divinity itself, within the circle of a system which human reason might enlarge or contract at will. More exactness was desired than the mythology which satisfied the vulgar had ever possessed. Something in the way of proof was also wished for in respect to the dogmas which set forth the nature of God and the destiny of mankind. The actual wants of the soul, with reference to all these particulars, were amply met by those who preached the gospel in its fulness and simplicity. But it was not the real necessities of the soul that were most felt. Like a man in a fever, the poor, bewildered heathen panted rather for that which might satisfy his thirst, than for the medicine which might heal his sickness. And it was not a desire like this which the physician of souls, or those who acted under his guidance, would satisfy. Restoration to health, the gift and permanency of life, without disease or deformity, were the blessings offered by the gospel. To indulge the momentary passion, to relieve the present pain while the malady was left untouched, would have been to compromise the dignity of the Word which was to save by regenerating. The ministers of Christ, therefore, refused to indulge the vain curiosity of the disputer of this world. They preached repentance and forgiveness of sins through the blood of the Re-

'deemer. They assured the penitent believer of his acceptance with God, of his being made a partaker of the precious influences of the heavenly Spirit, and of his receiving in his own heart such proofs of the Divine favour as should be sufficient to carry him forward through all the difficulties and dangers of his future course.

Very different was the method adopted by the heretical teachers. They began by an appeal to the pride of the human mind. Instead of humbling it by showing how, by wisdom or vain reasoning, the world had lost sight of the true God, they virtually represented it as capable of exploring the heights and depths of eternity. The existence of the worst desires of the heart was accounted for, not by the simple fact which Scripture assigns as their origin, but by a theory which gave to evil as real a claim to dominion as the good God himself possesses. Repentance, a change of nature, a new life of actual holiness, had no place in the requirements of such systems. There was nothing, therefore, in their morality to prevent their being adopted by the most sensual of mankind ; while the boldness or hardihood which they generally exhibited, and the occasional flashes of imagination which threw a glare over the darkest parts, were well calculated to fascinate minds weary of the puerilities of heathenism in matters of faith, but not of the low indulgences which it tolerated and encouraged.

Many things are related of Simon Magus which have too much the air of fable to be received as history. But they prove that a strange delusion existed in the world respecting such daring pretenders. Simon is said to have been the very first author of heresy under the gospel.*

* St. Irenæus contra Hæres. lib. i. c. xxiii. St. Cyril Catechet. Lec. vi. c. 14.

But if the common traditions respecting him be true, he was rather a blasphemous impostor than a heretic. According to ancient writers, he dared to represent himself as God and Christ, and as the blessed Spirit. The emperor Claudius, it is said, set up a statue in his honour, and even listened to his ravings with equal terror and submission. It is difficult to determine how much of the story may be received, but several writers affirm, that Simon having engaged to fly through the air, was actually borne aloft by the aid of demons. The multitude beholding the miracle were ready to own the impostor as a deity; but at this moment St. Peter stood forth, and falling upon his knees, implored the Almighty not to allow the power of error to prevail. The prayer was heard, and Simon was dashed to pieces on the ground.*

Simon was succeeded by Menander, also a Samaritan by birth, and of whom it is said that he attained to the most perfect knowledge of magic. But in the account given of his teaching, we begin to discover the means whereby men of his character were enabled to attract the notice of those who can scarcely be supposed to have believed like the multitude in the grosser arts of deception. Menander taught that the world was made by angels, sent forth from the Divine mind; and he asserted that he enjoyed the secret knowledge whereby those sovereign powers of the universe might be made subject to the human will.

The rich and magnificent city of Antioch was the scene chosen by Menander for the exercise of his impiously-assumed authority. His success was sufficient to encourage

* Justin Martyr; *Apologia*, I. c. 26, speaks both of the magical arts practised by Simon, and of his being worshipped; but does not mention the contest with the apostles. So also Irenæus. Both these authors wrote before the end of the second century.

* others to follow in the same career.* Saturninus and Basilides taught, like him, that there was one eternal God, who created indeed angels and archangels, but left to them, or seven of the number, the task of creating whatever else exists. Man was the work of these inferior powers; but the image according to which they created him had first shone down upon them as an apparition from on high. Both these, and other heretics, also taught that the God of the Jews was but an angel, or an angry and an evil being, whose power it was the object of Jesus to resist and annihilate.†

Basilides, who took his station in Alexandria, long distinguished for its schools of mystical philosophy, displayed, as the foundation of his system, a formal genealogy of the several classes of divine essences. Thus, having confessed the existence of the prime, eternal Deity, or supreme Father, he placed, as next in order, a being to whom he gave the Greek name of *Nous*, that is, Mind or Intelligence. From this descended the *Logos*, or Word; next in descent was *Phronesis*, or Prudence;‡ then came *Sophia* and *Dynamis*, that is, Wisdom and Power; from which sprang virtues, principalities, and angels.

These several orders constituted the first, or highest heaven. Immediately succeeding, was a second heaven, consisting also of various angelic powers, descending in mystical procession from each other. Then came a third,

* Like Simon, he pretended to possess a divine nature, and denied the hope of salvation to any one not baptized in his name.—*Tertullian. De Præscrip.* c. 46.

† Irenæus *Contra Hæres.* lib. i. 23, 24. *Tertullian. De Præscrip. Hæret.* c. 46.

‡ Or, according to Tertullian, Providence. *De Præscrip. Hæret.* c. 46.

and so on, till the number of heavens, each furnished with its family of divinities and virtues, amounted to three hundred and sixty-five, the perfect sum of the various provinces of the universe.

The system thus displayed had, in all probability, a more ancient origin than that ascribed to it as a heresy under the gospel.* Its principles may be traced in the traditions of the remote East ; and Basilides and his companions only modified its form, so as to render it more readily acceptable among their followers. The semblance of profound thought which it exhibited, and still more the seeming harmony and connexion of its several parts, were well calculated to fascinate a certain class of minds. But the generation of the heavens, or the emanation, or procession of the *Æons*, the term used in other similar systems, was intimately blended with the views which their authors took of Christianity. Like Mahomet, they desired to have the gospel on their side ; and so to mingle its doctrines with their own wild imaginations as to give them the advantage of being supported, on the one side, by the oldest of the mystical religions, and, on the other, by the only system which in later ages had exhibited the slightest signs of internal life—the faintest appearance of having in itself sufficient power and vigour to make its way through the world by the weight and solemnity of its doctrines.

But the gospel could no more be made to symbolize with human fancies, than could its divine Author be humbled to take his place in the circle of heathen deities. The attempt of the heretics, therefore, exhibits the utter absurdity of their schemes, and the awful prostration of

* Tertullian describes it as the offspring of human philosophy.—*De Præscrip. Hæret. c. 7.*

the human intellect when employed in corrupting the Word of God. Thus, according to the dogmas of Basilides, the lowest of the three hundred and sixty-five heavens consists of this world, its various elements and inhabitants, above which sits supreme the God worshipped by the Jews, and to whom he has ever been striving to subject all the other creatures of the earth. To resist this tyranny, the eternal and Almighty Deity, the prime source of existence, was pleased, in pity to mankind, to send forth his first-begotten offspring, that is, *Nous* or Intelligence, and which powerful and wonderful being became *Christ*. But it was inconsistent with the heretical notion that this pure intelligence could suffer. It was therefore argued, that as he was proceeding towards Calvary, Simon the Cyrenian took not only his cross, but his very form, and suffered in his stead. "To obtain salvation, then," said the heretics, "it is not the crucified whom we own as Lord, but the great being who, mocking his enemies as they seemed to triumph over him, returned to his glory in the highest heavens."

This outline of one of the earliest heretical systems will be sufficient to show how little sympathy those who embraced them could have with the faithful worshippers of Jesus. The assumption of a right to speak of the gospel, as in anywise connected with their schemes, only tended to bring the false teachers and the true believers into direct collision. It was evident to the latter, that the spirit of error had tempted the unhappy heretics to employ the Scriptures to the worst of purposes ; that they were making use of clear and precious Divine revelations to justify the most destructive of falsehoods and corruptions ; and that they were going about in the name of Christ, and with his gospel in their hands, to offer the most frightful of insults to the God of truth.

It is necessary to bear these things in mind, in order to account for the extreme severity with which the early writers speak of heresy and heretics. These terms have been in later times so largely employed, and in reference to disputes of such an entirely different character, that it is well to know how they originated, and what were the distinguishing circumstances which influenced the minds of those who first adopted them. One of the most celebrated of those great men who stemmed the tide which was ready to overwhelm the truth, denied to heretics the right of appealing to Scripture in defence of their systems.* This is another of those startling points in ecclesiastical history which requires to be considered, because a use has sometimes been made of it to which it can never legitimately be put. Tertullian spoke of heretics who utterly set at nought the authority of Scripture as a whole. They rejected large portions of it at their will or convenience. The very facts which it records were distorted into the wildest forms, or applied to the most absurd or impious purposes; and a Christian, by basing his argument on the written word, or by even allowing himself to be drawn into a dispute on its contents, was sure to have his heart oppressed with a thousand distracting thoughts, excited by the blasphemy of his reckless opponents. Instead, therefore, of meeting them on Scriptural ground, Tertullian would have the Christian champion keep the heretics in the open field of history and reason. Here they could find no shelter, except in the mass of absurdities and contradictions for which they were themselves chargeable. Scripture might be perverted and mystified, and still, to uninstructed minds, wear the appearance of revelation. Facts and plain moral truths

* Tertullian: *De Præscrip. Hæret.* c. 15, 19, 37.

could not ; and hence the wisdom of Tertullian's plea, that the Book of God belongs to the children of God—that the rule of Christian faith ought not to be employed to give colour or authority to systems altogether at variance with its spirit.

Many were the evils which the church of Christ suffered through the growth of heresy. Confounded as the worst of the new errors often were with the gospel itself, men of the world despised the latter, not, as originally, for its humbling doctrines, but for what they believed to be its gross and dangerous extravagances. The lives, moreover, of the heretical leaders were commonly passed in base licentiousness, and this was attributed to the influence of Christianity. In every way, also, in which these men or their followers could prejudice the members of the church in the eyes of the magistrates, they failed not to employ their power. Many partial persecutions were thus excited ; and there is little doubt but that, as St. Peter is said to have suffered death in consequence of his opposition to Simon Magus, other eminent believers fell in a similar manner through the envy of hostile heretics.

But it was from the Jews, and especially from that portion of them which still lingered amid the scenes of their ancient glory, that the Christians, in the time of Adrian, suffered the most grievous inflictions. Jerusalem, raised from its ruins, but no longer wearing the form, or even known by the name,* so dear to its people, stood as an oppressed and degraded captive on its sacred hills. The temple of the Lord of the whole earth had been levelled with the ground to give place to the shrines of Jupiter ; and every rock and valley, not one of which was without its consecration, now exhibited some sign of the

* Adrian called it *Elia Capitolina*.—*Eusebius*, lib. iv. c. vi. n. c.

heathen's triumph. But the horrors of the last fifty years—the miseries and degradation which they were at present suffering, did not suffice to subdue the wrath or lessen the courage of the unhappy Jews. Numbers of them preferred a painful and hazardous life amid the mountains of Judæa, to one of ease and luxury, which was still offered them in Alexandria, and other cities where they had been anciently colonized. The want of a leader was supplied by Barchochebas, a man of desperate fortune and abandoned character. The accident of his name, which signified the son of the star, excited both in his own mind and in that of his followers, a crowd of fancies which served to increase the enthusiasm with which they were already inspired.

First one and then another little band came forth from the fastnesses about Jerusalem. The standard of revolt was set up. Barchochebas gathered around him a powerful army ; and, for a time, held sway over a considerable portion of the country. In the progress of his predatory warfare he continually met with small communities of Christians, who still retained enough of the character of Jews, or whose confessed reverence for the ancient covenant, as introductory to the new, was sufficiently strong, to induce the belief that they would readily assist in restoring the nation to its former glory. Great, then, was the indignation of Barchochebas and his followers, on learning from these Christians, that they would draw no sword, even in defence of their own dearest rights ; that they placed their sole hope of the final triumph of God's people on the power of the gospel and the blessed Spirit ; and that they believed the prophecies which foretold the dispersion of the Jews, spoke only of their restoration when they should repent, and with humble and grateful

hearts acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Neither persuasions nor threats could induce the Christians to alter or conceal what they professed to believe on these subjects ; and Barchochebas oppressed and tortured them with insatiable fury.*

A. D.
134. But the impostor's career was speedily terminated. Adrian learnt that the example of the

Jews in Palestine had excited parties of the same people in other countries to form plots against the government. A strong army was, therefore, raised and sent into Judæa. The conflict which followed proved the despair of the Jews and the power of their enemies. Five hundred and eighty thousand men are said to have perished in the battles which were fought. A corresponding number of the sick and aged, and of women and children, perished by famine or pestilence ; and the whole country presented, at the end of the war, one terrible scene of misery and devastation.

To prevent the recurrence of such calamities, Adrian passed a law prohibiting the appearance of a Jew within sight of Jerusalem. This edict had the effect of dispersing such of the Christian congregations as were composed of converts from Judaism. According to Eusebius, fifteen bishops of Jewish origin had presided in regular succession over the church at Jerusalem.† The revolution which had now taken place necessarily occasioned a change in the state of the Christians in Palestine. Such among them as the Romans regarded in the light of Jews were obliged to leave the land ; and for those who remained, ministers had to be appointed who were of Gentile, not Hebrew, origin. The first bishop of this class was

* Justin Martyr Apol. I. sec. xxxi.

† Eccles. Hist. lib. iv. c. v. vi.

named Mark, and thenceforward the bishops of Jerusalem were elected like other bishops of the universal church, without respect to any particular race.

A. D.
138: The character of Antoninus Pius, Adrian's successor, was distinguished by so much that was virtuous and elevated, that a reasonable hope might have been entertained of some important advance being made by his influence in the great cause of toleration. But independent of the adverse prejudices which darkened the understandings of the best of men while heathens, the power of circumstances, the mighty action of popular opinion, even though the people be themselves enslaved, were felt as remarkably in the age of which we are speaking as they have been in later and happier times. Whatever, therefore, might be the individual character of the reigning emperor his wishes formed but a small item in the mass of influences which had to be met, resisted, or modified, in the defence and propagation of the gospel.

No imperial edict could have either prevented the birth of heresies or effectually stopped their attacks on pure Christianity. As little could absolute authority effect in subduing the horror with which the countless heathen multitudes beheld the worshippers of Jesus pouring contempt upon temples and altars pregnant with divinity. In these respects, the power of rulers was as ineffectual as the caprices of a child. The controversy was one of life and death to the everlasting and essential interests of humanity. To determine such a dispute, knowledge, wisdom, experience, and the virtues which are comprehended in the general idea of well-willing, or benevolence, had a claim to the first hearing. But to obtain this for them, how long and painful a struggle was necessary on the part of their allies! and when they were even

beginning to be understood by some, how slowly and how patiently had that little band of converts to pursue the path of duty which they had with such difficulty discovered.

The means employed by Christ's disciples to establish his religion and his church were, during the early ages, in exact conformity with the nature of his doctrines. Whatever the infirmity of individuals, the congregation of the faithful, the church itself, never justified, or adopted, a measure which violated either the charity or the simplicity of the gospel. Its successes, therefore, could only be attributed to the power of truth and heavenly grace. And if its progress was often delayed, the interruptions to its course may be easily accounted for by those who know that God not only works by means, but uses the very means which He employs so as still to keep their nature and peculiarities in view. The gospel being itself spiritual, was to convert spiritually. Fire and sword might have sooner tamed the wrath of the heathen. But the design of the blessed Jesus would not have been accomplished by such a conversion. It was his will to prove and exercise the power of truth ; and his word, administered according to his own directions, was the sacred instrument appointed for this work.

Two conspicuous instances of the sufficiency of the gospel to strengthen the soul against all its adversaries, to convert and enlighten, may be referred to in this place.

We have seen that Polycarp was at the head of the church in Smyrna, when the venerable Ignatius stopped at that place on his way to Rome. Irenæus,* and other

* Irenæus cont. Hæres. lib. iii. c. iii. Eusebius, lib. iv. c. xiv.

ancient writers, tell us that he was made bishop of Smyrna by St. John. His fervent love to Christ, and faithful labours among his people, raised him to the high station which he deserved to hold in their affections. The first controversy known in the church as likely to injure the union of its members, arose from the circumstance that the festival of Easter was not observed on the same day in the western as in the Asiatic churches. In the latter, the calculation which determined the Jewish passover was still continued, and on whatever day of the week the fourteenth of the first month in the Ecclesiastical year fell, that was the day for the celebration of Easter. The authority of St. John was quoted in support of this usage ; while the western churches, which had always observed Easter on the *Sunday* after the first full moon, the first day of the week being so peculiarly consecrated by the resurrection of Jesus, appealed equally to apostolic authority and primitive custom.*

So earnestly was this subject debated by many enlightened and devout Christians, that the pastors of the several churches thought it necessary to take measures for quieting the agitation. No one possessed greater influence in the East than Polycarp, and at the request of his brethren, he made a journey to Rome for the purpose of consulting with Anicetus whether it might not be possible to establish uniformity as to the time of observing the Easter festivals. Anicetus received the venerable man

* A further controversy was afterwards excited even among those who agreed in the general principle. Their calculations were founded on different data, and hence it was not always on the same Sunday that the several churches observed Easter.—*Bingham's Antiquities*, b. xx. c. v. s. 2. The Jewish Ecclesiastical year began with the month Nisan, answering to our March.

with the reverence due to one who was acknowledged to be a disciple of the apostles, and who possessed the highest and best gifts of the Holy Spirit. As a peculiar mark of affection and honour, he invited him to preside at the celebration of the blessed communion ; and nothing was omitted which could be done to mark the peaceful and brotherly feelings of the church in Rome towards its sisters in distant countries. And the temper which thus prevailed was not to be disturbed by any of the differences which existed on the subject which brought Polycarp from Smyrna to Italy. Neither he nor Anicetus could be induced to give up his original notions respecting the traditions which they had adopted. But neither pretended to dictate to the other ; and they parted in perfect peace, each leaving to his brother the right to act in a matter which concerned no vital truth or doctrine according to his conscience.

That this disposition to avoid or soften provocatives to controversy, did not arise from a low tone of feeling in respect to doctrine, is strikingly proved by the conduct of Polycarp towards heretics. Marcion, one of the most celebrated of these opponents of the pure gospel, was then at Rome. He was a native of Pontus, and the son of a pious bishop. The irregularity of his conduct grieved his parent to the heart, and, to preserve the discipline of his own community, the venerable old man found himself obliged to expel his unworthy son from the church. Full of shame, Marcion left his native province, and hastened to Rome. There he applied to the presbyters to be admitted into their order ; but they answered, that they could not do so without the recommendation of his father, for that there was but one doctrine in the church, and one communion.

Gerdon,* whose heresy answered in its general character to those already spoken of, had numerous followers in Rome, and to this party Marcion, driven out of the church, now joined himself. Employing his invention on the dogmas of his master, he soon formed a system of his own. In this we again meet with the mention of two governing principles, the one good, the other evil ; and with the assertion, that the God of the Jews who made the world is not the supreme God who rules in the highest heaven. Marcion also taught that the two deities have each their Christ : that Jesus was the good Christ, and that, consequently, he did not work for the salvation of the saints and patriarchs under the Old Testament, who were the servants of the God of the Jews, but rather for that of Cain and others who were only accounted wicked because they were the enemies of that God. Strange to say, these awful absurdities instead of disgusting, fascinated the minds of many, and such was the enthusiasm with which the severest of Marcion's dictates were obeyed, that his followers not only readily submitted to the most painful rules of self-denial, but in several cases endured martyrdom rather than renounce their faith.

Marcion had arrived at the height of his popularity when Polycarp visited Rome. Meeting the holy man in the street one day, he exclaimed, " Dost thou know me, Polycarp ? " " Yes ! " replied the saint ; " I know thee, the first-born of Satan ! "† Often in his discourses, it is said, would he lament the spread of heresies, and deplore that

* Irenæus, lib. i. c. xxvii. He taught, says this author, that the God spoken of in the law and the prophets was not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was cotemporary with Valentinus.

† Irenæus, lib. iii. c. iii. Eusebius, lib. iv. c. xiv.

he had lived to see the doctrines of Christ's church so fearfully assailed. To show that he did but imitate the apostles in his zeal against error, he was fond of relating an anecdote of the blessed St. John, who happening to be in a bath which Cerinthus had entered, on discovering who the stranger was, fled in terror, exclaiming, that he feared the building might fall and crush him, if he remained in the same place with such an enemy of the truth.

The wisdom and fervour with which Polycarp addressed them, induced many who had fallen into the snares of heresy to reconsider the nature of the gospel. Heavenly grace assisting, they were enabled to discover that mere human invention formed the only foundation on which their favourite notions rested ; while, on the other hand, every doctrine found in Scripture had both the authority of the divine word to support it, and its obvious application to the necessities of sinful but repenting creatures. Conversion, in numerous instances, followed this discovery, and Polycarp left Rome with the happy assurance that, though he could not persuade his beloved brother Anicetus to make any change in respect to Easter, many and important blessings were the consequence of his journey.

On the accession of Marcus Aurelius, some hope
 A. D. might again have been entertained, that the ele-
 161. vated and moral character of the emperor would tend to the security of a people like the Christians. But he cherished the loftiest notions of the value of philosophy. Its more eminent professors never failed, therefore, to secure his favourable notice ; and their interested representations greatly strengthened the prejudices with which a mind, naturally stern and proud, may be supposed to have viewed the gospel from a distance, and while its

noblest characteristics were either unknown or imperfectly understood. Thus it was the favourite sentiment of Aurelius, that death ought to be met cheerfully as one of the circumstances proper to human existence. When, however, the patience and resolution with which the Christians died were described to him, he only answered, that they were the effect of a blind and wicked obstinacy.

Advantage was taken of the known sentiments of the emperor to renew the persecution of the Christians in many of the distant provinces. Smyrna bore its share in the visitation. Statius Quadratus was at that time the proconsul, a man who appears to have had no wish on his own part to shed blood, but who had neither the will nor the resolution to endanger his popularity by an attempt to save the Christians when publicly accused. Dragged before his tribunal, many were there who so boldly persevered in their confession of Christ, as their God and Saviour, that he deemed himself constrained to subject them to torture. Among those who stood foremost in this trial of faith was a young man, named Germanicus.* His appearance and heroism deeply interested the proconsul; and he was earnestly persuaded to save himself by a speedy recantation. But instead of listening to these intreaties, he declared his readiness to die; and being led to the amphitheatre, rushed forward to meet the wild beast which had been set loose to devour him.

The sight of his daring fortitude only inspired the multitude with a wish to wreak their vengeance more effectually on the Christians. An unhappy man, named Quintus, was the next who prepared himself for the sacrifice. But

* *Epistola Eccles. Smyrnen. De Martyrio S. Polycarp. Cotelierius T. ii. p. 124.*

the spectacle before him, the crowds around the amphitheatre, the roaring of the wild beasts, and the fierce looks of the guards, filled him with unspeakable terror. The proconsul beheld his agonizing alarm. He had witnessed other cases of the same kind, and knew his time. "Swear by the gods," he exclaimed, "and sacrifice, and I will set you free." The wretched Quintus, who had presumptuously sought for martyrdom, immediately purchased the pardon held out to him ; he denied Christ, sacrificed to the idols, and went forth to suffer, for the remainder of his days, the worst agonies of a self-condemned and self-tortured soul.

Nothing could exceed the rage of the people at this moment. Germanicus had maddened them by the calmness with which he bore their cruel inflictions ; and Quintus, by his recantation, had deprived them of an expected addition to their favourite spectacle. "Exterminate the atheists !" was the cry of the multitude. "Let Polycarp be sought for."

The search was begun, but Polycarp had yielded to the intreaties of his friends, and retired to a small country-house at a little distance from the city. Ready as were the Christians of Smyrna to suffer rather than deny their Lord, the lamentable instances which had occurred of the weakness of mere enthusiasm, had taught them caution, and they found, on referring to the gospel, that no authority was given them to cast away their lives for the mere purpose of display.*

But Polycarp knew that his end was nigh, and that the time had arrived when he might glorify Jesus, by his

* "We do not praise those," said the Christians of Smyrna, "who thrust themselves forward."—*Epis. Eccles. Smyr. sec. iv.*

death, as he had done in his long and laborious life. He rejoiced in the retirement provided for him, not because he desired to escape death, but because he was enabled in the quiet of the country to pass his days and nights in holy meditation. While wrapt in thought and prayer, on one of those occasions when his brethren were assembled in the little chamber of his villa, he beheld, it is said, the vision which represented to him the scene of his last sufferings. As the prophetic forms passed away, he turned to his people, and calmly said, "I am to be burnt alive." A report arriving that the officers of the proconsul were nigh at hand, he allowed himself to be conveyed to another villa. There, at the end of three days, he was found by those employed to apprehend him, and who had taken for their guides two domestics, induced by 'torture to betray their master. He might still have escaped, but he exclaimed, "The will of the Lord be done ;" and immediately surrendered himself into the hands of the officers. He had been bishop of Smyrna between sixty and seventy years, and was consequently in extreme old age. The men who stood armed about him could not refrain from observing that little violence was needed to secure such a prisoner. Taking advantage of their good humour, Polycarp requested liberty to pass one hour in prayer undisturbed, while the men partook of the repast which he had ordered to be provided for them. The desire was granted ; and for the hour which had been asked, and for still another hour, did the aged saint continue to pour out his soul in supplications and thanksgiving to his Lord. So full of pathos and fervour were his words, that not even the rude soldiers who stood near could resist their gracious influence. They bowed their heads to the power of holiness.

Their minds felt the stirrings of a new life ; and some of them, it is said, confessed aloud that they lamented being engaged to do aught against the divine old man.

Having placed him on an ass, the guards led him towards the city. On the way, they were met by the Irenarch Herodes* and his father Nicetas. These persons, in the vain hope of gaining fame by inducing him to recant, took him into their carriage, and began their argument by inquiring what harm or danger there could be in worshipping Cæsar, or in offering a sacrifice ? The aged bishop, briefly replying that he would do none of these things, was rudely thrust from the carriage, and fell heavily to the ground. His limbs were severely injured by the fall, but he rose and pursued his way to the city with the best haste he could. The proconsul, on seeing him take his place before the tribunal, employed the usual threats and persuasions to induce him to recant. "Swear," he said, "by the fortune of Cæsar : repent, and exclaim, 'Take away the impious !' and I will dismiss you." Polycarp only replied by looking round upon the wrathful multitude, then busy in blaspheming Christ and his gospel, and lifting up his hands, he repeated the proconsul's words, "Take away the impious !" But the magistrate still urged him to recant. "Swear, and curse Christ," he repeated, "and you are safe." "Eighty and six years," answered Polycarp, "have I been the servant of Christ. In nought has he been unjust towards me. How can I blaspheme my Lord and my Saviour ?" To the further persuasions of the proconsul, he added, "You seem to be ignorant

* The Irenarch was an officer chosen annually, and whose duty it was to watch over the manners of the people, and take cognizance of whatever concerned the public peace.—*Usser. ap. Cotelierius*, t. ii. p. 195. n. 18.

that I am a Christian. If you wish to be instructed in the doctrines of the gospel, give me a day, and hear my words." The proconsul answered, "Convince the people." "No," returned Polycarp, "I have deemed you worthy of the instruction which I offer ; for we are taught to render fitting honour to princes and magistrates. But I regard not the multitude as deserving now to be addressed by arguments or apologies."

Unmoved by the dignified behaviour of the venerable man, Quadratus angrily exclaimed, "Hearken ! I have wild beasts at hand, and I will cast you among them unless you at once repent." "We Christians," was the firm reply, "are not accustomed to repent so as turn from the better to the worse ; but ever consider it right to leave what is wicked for what is righteous." "Since, then," said the proconsul, "you despise the wild beasts, I will order you to be consumed by fire." "You threaten me," replied the saint, "with fire which burns for an hour, and then is extinguished. Alas ! you know not that there is a judgment to come, nor that the wicked will be punished with everlasting burnings."

Some impression appears to have been made on the mind of the proconsul by these last words ; but it speedily passed away, and the next moment a herald was sent into the midst of the assembly, to proclaim that Polycarp had confessed himself a Christian. No sooner was the voice of the herald heard, than the vast assembly filled the air with their shouts, and demanded that the president of the games should immediately bring Polycarp into the circus to be devoured by lions. But this could not be done. It was unlawful to continue the spectacles beyond a certain hour. "Then let him be straightway committed to the flames," was the answer of the crowd. The assent of the

magistrates being gained to this wish of the people, they immediately rushed to the baths, and other places, where wood and combustible materials could be most readily procured. Sufficient for the pile was soon collected ; the Jews, it is said, eagerly rendering their assistance to those employed in its construction. All things being ready, Polycarp began to remove his vestments ; but age and infirmity rendered it difficult for him to unloose his sandals, and thus was brought to mind the affectionate solicitude with which the members of his church had been accustomed to attend him : for, it is said, that they had ever considered it a high privilege to be permitted to show their filial reverence for his person.

Having prepared himself as quickly as his feeble limbs would allow, he patiently awaited the executioners ; but when they were proceeding to nail him to the stake, he said, “ Leave me as I am ; for He who gives me to endure the fire, will also give me power to remain unmoved in the pile without the help of your nails.”* This request being granted, the executioners merely bound him ; and as he stood awaiting the firing of the pile, he thus poured out his soul to God :—“ O Lord God Almighty ! Father of Jesus Christ, thy beloved and blessed Son, through whom thou hast been made known to us, the God of angels, and powers, and of every creature, and of the whole family of the just who live before thee, I bless thee for thy having counted me worthy of this day and hour ; and for thy permitting me to have my lot among thy martyrs, and to drink with them of the cup of thy Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body, by the incorruption of the Holy Spirit. May I this day be received among them into thy presence, by a good and acceptable

* De Martyris S. Polycap. Cotelarius, t. ii. p. 195.

sacrifice, even as thou, unerring God of truth, hast prepared, and foreshown, and fulfilled it. Wherefore for all things I praise, and bless, and glorify thee ; and with thee thy beloved, heavenly, and eternal Son, Jesus Christ, to whom with thee and the Holy Spirit be glory now and for ever."

As he pronounced the word *Amen*, the officers set fire to the pile ; and when the broad flames rose and glared around him, his faithful followers wept as having seen the last of their beloved master. But suddenly the mass of flame swelling out, like a sail filled with the wind, left the body of the martyr open to view. "It looked at this time," say those who were present at the scene, "like gold or silver glowing with the fire of a furnace ;" and, according to the same witnesses, a sweet odour was diffused around like that of incense.*

The multitude began to express their impatience at the slowness with which the fire seemed to do its work. Desiring to silence their murmurs, one of the executioners approached, and struck the martyr a violent blow with his dagger. But the sufferer still stood erect, and the blood which flowed freely from the wound so damped the fury of the flames, that his form again became visible to the enraged multitude. Great was the astonishment which prevailed throughout the assembly. Something of a miracle appeared to have been wrought ; and when the body of the martyr was at length sinking on the pile, many of the spectators rushed forward to secure and bear it off. The officer of the guard interfered to prevent a tumult. None were more anxious to see the remains of the saint treated with contempt and scattered to the winds than the Jews. They had taken an active part in

* De Martyris, Cotelerius, t. ii. p. 199. n. 81.

urging the heathen to demand his death ; and they now reminded them, that if they neglected to destroy the body, which lay whitening in the smouldering ashes, the Christians might leave the crucified Jesus to worship the martyr of Smyrna. The notion that such might possibly be the case wrought powerfully on the minds of some of the nobles present ; and the officer of the guard, to end the dispute, directed the soldiers to see the body altogether consumed. This was done, and the Christians had only the satisfaction allowed them of collecting, when the crowd was dispersed and the burning pile was itself reduced to ashes, a few of the bones of that beloved pastor to whom many among them had been indebted for the first tidings of salvation, and for that heavenly knowledge which still kept them faithful to the Lord.

The only relic which exists of St. Polycarp, as a writer, is his Epistle to the Philippians.* This letter appears to have been composed at the period when the blessed Ignatius was preparing for martyrdom, or had just offered up himself as a willing sacrifice to Christ. It is written in the spirit, and almost in the words, of the gospel. Having exhorted the Philippians to cultivate the virtues which are proper to Christian holiness, the author adds, with edifying humility, "I do not write these things, concerning righteousness, as of my own accord, or from my own authority, but because you have called upon me to do so. For neither can I, nor any one like me, attain to the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who being in person among such of you as lived in those days, taught diligently

* Irenæus says, that Polycarp wrote Epistles to the neighbouring churches, confirming them in the faith, and to several of the brethren, admonishing and exhorting them.—*Fragmenta Epist. ad Florin* Op. p. 340. Eusebius, lib. v. c. 20.

and with power the word of truth. And when he was absent, he wrote to you an epistle, by looking carefully into which, you may be greatly edified in that faith which has been given you, and which is the mother of us all, hope following it, and love to God and to Christ, and to our neighbour, preceding it. For if any one be within the circle of these things, he has fulfilled the commandment of righteousness, seeing that he who has love is far from all iniquity.”*

This is followed by an exhortation, addressed to believers in various social relations ; and so great a stress is laid, both in this place and others, on the guilt of avarice, that there is reason to fear that many in this early age stood in need of the warning. In the next paragraph he calls upon the deacons to walk and labour blameless in the presence of his righteousness, as ministers of God and Christ, and not of men. And of the elders, or presbyters, he says, “ Let them be compassionate, having pity upon all ; converting those who have erred, visiting the sick and infirm, not neglecting the widow, the orphan, or the destitute ; but, on the contrary, providing all things honest in the sight both of God and man.† Let them abstain from wrath, from respect to persons, from unjust judgment ; being far from all covetousness ; not readily receiving an accusation against any one, and refraining from all severity in judgment.” Referring then to the heresies which were beginning to corrupt the gospel, he says, “ Whosoever confesses not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is antichrist ; and he who confesses not the martyrdom of the cross is of the devil. And whosoever perverts the doctrines of the Lord for his own desires, and says that there is no resurrection or judgment, he is the first-born

* Sec. iii

† Jacobson, t. ii. p. 477.

of Satan. Wherefore giving no heed to the foolishness of the multitude, or to their false doctrines, let us turn to the word committed to us from the beginning, being sober, and with prayer and fasting, supplicating the all-seeing God not to lead us into temptation, according to the saying of the Lord, 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'"*

Such is the simple and evangelical character of Polycarp's Epistle. In one of the concluding passages he expresses his hope, that they to whom he wrote were well exercised in sacred Scripture, and that nothing was hidden from them. He also speaks of the Epistles of Ignatius which he had transmitted to the Philippians, and the careful reading of which, he says, would be profitable to them, since they abounded in lessons of faith and patience, and whatever else might tend to edification in the Lord.†

Cotemporary with Polycarp was Justin Martyr, a man placed from his youth under very different circumstances to those of Polycarp, and of a different mental constitution, but owning, like him, the power of the sanctifying gospel, and the right of the blessed Jesus to the sacrifice of his life whenever it might be required in the service of holiness.

Justin was born at Naplous, in Samaria, but of Gentile parents. Naturally of an active and inquiring mind, he early devoted himself to the study of philosophy. In the pursuit of wisdom he attached himself at first, and when about thirty years of age, to a Stoic, from whom he earnestly hoped to learn something of the nature of God and of his providence. But his master could give him no satisfactory information on the themes which every day

* Sec vii.

† Sec. xii. xiii.

began to occupy more of his thoughts. Vexed and disgusted, he next turned to the Peripatetics.* Among them he found a teacher, whose acuteness gave him some hope that his thirst for the highest species of knowledge might at length be in some degree satisfied. But while Justin's mind was wholly occupied with dreams of celestial science, the philosopher was calculating how much he might charge his new pupil for the desired instruction. "I had been with him only a few days," says Justin, "when he came to me and said, that if I wished our conversation to be of any use, I had better determine how much I was willing to pay him." Justin had hitherto been simple enough to imagine that philosophers were sincere in their expressions of contempt for the world and its gains. He now discovered that it was not so with all. But unwilling to let his feeling of disappointment prevail over higher considerations, he offered himself as a scholar to one of the most celebrated of the Pythagoreans. The master immediately inquired, whether he had diligently devoted himself to the study of astronomy, geometry, and music—the three elementary sciences out of which the Pythagoreans pretended to derive their acquaintance with the mysteries of heaven and eternity. Justin was obliged to confess his comparative ignorance. "How then," said the philosopher, "can you expect to know the rules which conduct to a happy life? You are unacquainted with the things which abstract the mind from sensual, and dispose it to the contemplation of spiritual, objects: how, therefore, is it possible for you to comprehend that which is essentially good and fair?"†

Dismayed at the thought that he must spend many

* Justin Martyr, Dialog. cum Trypho, sec. 2. Op. p. 103.

† Dialog. cum Trypho, sec. 2.

years in painful study before his mind could acquire familiarity with heavenly truth, Justin began to feel that he had better at once resign the uncertain and perhaps fruitless pursuit. But there was still another school of philosophy as yet untried, and if popular opinion spoke right, it promised something better than any of the rest. This was the Platonic school; and placing himself under a teacher of equal prudence and capacity, Justin made rapid advances in the path which he had chosen. "My knowledge," says he, "received daily large and important additions. I formed some conception of incorporeal things, and hastened passionately forward. The contemplation of ideas added wings to my mind. I seemed to have become wise on a sudden; to have put off ignorance and stupidity; and to have realized the hope of soon seeing God: for this is indeed the aim and end of the philosophy of Plato."

Justin had now found in philosophy all that philosophy could give. The highest and the noblest aspirations of the human soul, while below those regions of thought to which the Holy Spirit alone can exalt it, spoke in the language of Plato. Pride, ambition, earthly wisdom, and ingenuity, were at once convicted of hypocrisy if they approached the almost sacred precincts of his schools. Justin felt the infinite superiority of that which he was now taught to any thing he had before learnt. His mind, as he tells us, seemed to be borne upwards by a new and mighty power. It was, in fact, in his case, as in others, when a hearty desire of knowledge is the predominant passion. The first emotion which attends the conscious entrance of truth into the soul gives an elevating impulse to all its dispositions; and Justin, who had long felt himself chained to the earth by ignorance and the grossness

of present objects, regarded the discoveries of Platonism as so many revelations of the mysteries to know which was, in his estimation, to have reached the gates of heaven.

But greatly superior as seemed his present to his former state, Justin had a secret feeling that much was still necessary to accomplish the designs which his soul whispered were necessary to its final happiness. Impressed with this sentiment, he frequently retired into the most solitary parts of the country, or wandered along the sea-shore, indulging himself in silent meditation, and endeavouring to realize in his mind those dreams of a Divine perfection so dear to the genuine Platonist. In one of these lonely rambles, and when he was just entering his favourite retreat among the rocks, he was surprised by the appearance of an aged man, whose countenance, thoughtful and benign, inspired him at once with a feeling of respect. "Dost thou know me?" said the stranger. Justin answered in the negative. "Why then," said the old man, "dost thou look at me thus?" "I am somewhat surprised," was the reply, "to find you in this place; for I did not expect to meet any one here." The stranger answered, that some persons who belonged to him had wandered away, and that he hoped to find them in that neighbourhood. "But what dost thou here?" added he. "I am very fond," said Justin, "of these solitary rambles; far from the world, I can discourse with myself, and amid these scenes nothing exists to disturb my speculations." "Art thou, then," said the old man, "a lover of reasoning only, and not a lover of action and a lover of truth? Shouldst thou not attempt to practise virtue rather than to speculate upon it?"

Justin answered the question thus put to him by asking,

whether he could do any thing better or nobler than prove the power of reason ; the errors of those who resist it ; their opposition to God, and whatever is pure or conformable to his will ? “ But prudence,” he added, “ cannot exist without philosophy and right reason. Therefore it is the duty of us all to philosophize ; and excellence in this ought to be esteemed the noblest of works.”

This observation led to a discourse on the chief topics of Platonism, from which the stranger directed Justin’s thoughts to the revelations of those holy men who existed long before the oldest of the philosophers, and who, being beloved of God, and speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold the things which were to happen in the latter days, and which, said the venerable old man, have now come to pass. “ These alone,” added he, “ saw the truth, and announced it to mankind. They feared, they regarded no one ; but full of the Holy Spirit, and despising vain glory, they preached those things only which they had seen and heard. Their writings still remain ; and these, if read attentively and with faith, will lead an inquirer to the knowledge of that which concerns the beginning and the end of things, and whatever else it most behoves a philosopher to learn. They used not argument in their discourse, for they were faithful witnesses of the truth which is above all argument ; and the things which have come to pass, and are still coming to pass, suffice to prove the Divine character of their commission. But they also wrought miracles, which equally established their right to be acknowledged as witnesses of truth, and as the messengers of God the Creator and Father of us all, and of Jesus Christ his Son. This the false prophets, filled with a lying and impure spirit, neither did nor do, but they dare to perform pretended wonders, and to glorify

demons and erring spirits, enticing those who obey them into fatal delusions. Pray then," continued the old man, "that the gates of light may be opened unto thee ; for to perceive or understand these things belongs to him only to whom it is given by God and Christ."*

Having thus spoken, the venerable stranger departed, and Justin saw him no more. But thoughts, different to any he had before experienced, took possession of his mind. "A fire," says he, "was suddenly kindled within me, and I glowed with the love of those prophets and holy men who were the friends of Christ. I meditated on his discourses ; and as I revolved them in my heart, I found that his indeed was the only safe and profitable philosophy. Thus and for this am I now a philosopher ; and I would that all would reason as I have done, and cease to oppose themselves to the doctrines of the Saviour. There is indeed in the gospel something awful and terrible for those who have wandered from the right way ; but to those who humbly receive and cherish it, it becomes a most sweet refuge from fear and anxiety."

Justin gives this account of his conversion in his famous dialogue with Trypho the Jew.† At the conclusion of his narrative, he said to his companion, "If now thou art solicitous concerning thyself, and desirest salvation, trusting to God, and not blinded by prejudice, thou mayst, by acknowledging Christ, and by becoming holy,‡ secure to thyself true happiness and prosperity."

* Dialog. cum Tryphon. Op. p. 109.

† Held during Justin's abode at Ephesus. Eusebius, lib. iv. c. 18.

‡ Dialog. cum Tryphon. sec. viii.

There is some obscurity in the original of this passage. The phrase has been thought, and probably correctly, to be used in reference to baptism.

The Jew listened to this address with ill-dissembled contempt. Justin still wore the garb of a philosopher, and Trypho had engaged in conversation with him in the expectation of finding fair employment for his own learning and acuteness. But the turn given to the discourse seemed little favourable to display. It had been commenced, according to the custom of the times, in a public place ; and the companions of Trypho laughed outright on hearing Justin's conclusion. The Jew, more polished and cautious, only smiled ; and praising Justin's original diligence in inquiry, exhorted him to seek Plato again, and to cultivate the virtues which he taught, rather than continue in the errors with which his mind was now perplexed. "You have deserted God," he said, "to place your hope of safety in a mere man. If you will listen to me, and I now regard you as my friend, be circumcised ; observe the law, the sabbath, the holy days, the new moons. Do all things, in short, which the law prescribes, and then, perchance, you may find mercy with God." To this Justin replied in a tone of mild but firm rebuke ; showing the Jew how unfairly he judged of the gospel, and how incredible it ought to appear to him that so many men of sound understanding should have been willing to suffer the worst of tortures rather than renounce Christ, if there did not exist the strongest evidence of the truth of his word. This observation still further excited the rude mirth of the bystanders, and Trypho readily agreed with Justin that the subject of their discourse was too serious for such auditors, and that it would be better to seek a more retired spot for the continuance of the discussion. Retreating, therefore, from the crowd, they commenced at once with the larger consideration of the evidence on which the truth of the gospel rests ; and the

record of their dispute affords a most valuable example of the clearness with which the Christians of that early period surveyed the doctrines of their religion, and the nature of its origin.

Justin, we are told, spent the principal portion of his time at Rome.* Still bearing the habit which he first assumed as a philosopher, he continued to cultivate so much of his early studies as might serve to aid him in his labours for the gospel. The extent of his knowledge and his natural powers of mind secured him at all times a certain degree of respect, even among those who would otherwise have despised him for his belief in Christ. Two important objects engaged his attention while at Rome. He was anxious, on the one side, to defend his brethren from the calumnies which exposed them to the wrath of their temporal rulers ; and, on the other, to refute the false but specious arguments which the philosophers of the age industriously circulated among every class of the people. To accomplish the former design, he addressed two apologies to the emperor and the Roman senate. In these writings he made a powerful appeal to the justice and common sense of those whom he addressed. "We do not," he said, "claim your compassion ; we desire only to be judged on the fair trial and examination of our principles. If any crime can be proved against us, let the punishment which is due be inflicted ; but if we be guilty of no offence, do not, on account of evil rumours which have no foundation, injure innocent men, or rather your own selves ; judging not righteously, but by caprice and prejudice. Evident it is that neither good nor evil ought to be imputed to a mere name, unless accompanied by actions corresponding to its signification. Nor let it

* Hieron. Catalogus Script. Eccles. Justin.

be said that we are atheists because we do not worship the demons and gods of the heathen. We confess, indeed, that in respect to such gods we are atheists ; but far otherwise is it if mention be made of the only true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance, and of every other virtue without any mixture of evil. Him, and his Son coming from him, and teaching us these things, and the hosts of good angels who glorify him, and the prophetic Spirit—these we venerate ; to these we render worship, honouring them both in word and truth, and freely teaching to every one, desirous of learning, the doctrines which we ourselves have learnt.”*

To the accusations of immorality brought against the Christians, Justin answers, that, as among the Greeks, all were called philosophers who pretended to wisdom, however various their opinions or conduct might be, so was the common name of Christians given to multitudes who had nothing in common but their appellation. “ We desire, therefore,” he said, “ that the actions of those who are accused before the tribunals may be inquired into, and that the wicked may be punished ; not because they are Christians, but because they are wicked : and, on the other hand, that he who is found guiltless of any crime may be dismissed, as a Christian who has committed no offence. This is all we desire, for we have no wish to see our accusers punished. They suffer enough from their own malice, and ignorance of what is good.”†

In the next passage Justin speaks in the true language of Christian heroism :—“ But consider this. It is for your sakes that we thus speak ; for if we chose, how easily could we deny our faith when called upon to answer ! But we wish not to live at the expense of truth.

* *Apologia* i. sec. 4—6.

† *Ib.* sec. 7.

Fixing our desires on a life pure and eternal, we aim at attaining to the dwelling-place of God, the Father and ruler of all ; and we hasten to make confession of our faith, being persuaded and fully believing, that they who place their trust in God and his works will be admitted into his presence, and into those heavenly habitations where no evil can enter to disturb their happiness."

How little the Christians merited persecution for their refusal to worship images, or to engage in the other practices of the heathen, Justin proved from the nature of the Divine being. As inconsistent was it with right reason, he showed, to punish them on the plea that they were enemies of the state ; whereas the first principles of their religion led to the cultivation of peace and concord. He then demonstrates the moral power of the gospel by the changed lives and manners of those who had become believers, and has the boldness to declare that if the prayers of Christ's disciples, their conscientious obedience to the laws, and their open statement of the truth, did not avail to turn the hearts of their powerful persecutors, a future judgment, and the terrors of eternal fire, would at last convince them of their cruelty and injustice. Even the heathen, he urges, believed in a future state ; and both the philosophers and the poets of ancient times spoke of fire as the element in which all things are finally to be consumed.* The inconsistency of punishing the Christians for believing in Christ, who had so clearly proved himself to be divine, and of fostering the worshippers of idols, and the believers in the most vicious of mythological fables, furnished another powerful argument to the courageous and acute apologist. Nor pausing here, he shows how the emperors, rejecting what was so reasonable, and

* Apolog. i.

so worthy of attention, had allowed such men as Simon Magus, Menander, and Marcion, to publish, uninterrupted, the most monstrous of errors ; nay, had even protected and aided them, and, in some instances, exalted them to honour and dignity. But the very men here spoken of were the authors of sects which soon proved their evil origin, by the perpetration of every species of immorality. Still they were called Christians ; and hence, while on the one hand, the power of demons aided them in effecting the basest designs, the name of Christ, on the other, was brought into contempt through the subsequent discovery of their infamous proceedings.

But, in the next place, there were those who objected, that the miracles of Jesus might be of the same kind as those wrought by magicians. To these Justin replies, that the reality of what Jesus did, and the truth of what he taught, were amply vindicated and supported by the ancient prophets, who so clearly foretold every important circumstance in his life, labours, and sufferings. The doctrine of our Lord's divinity as the Word of God ; the miraculous conception ; and the prophetic office of the Holy Spirit, are very clearly set forth in this important part of the Apology. Justin had been trained to the contemplation of abstruse points in philosophy. He knew that it was not by subtle reasoning sinners were to be converted or rendered holy ; but he believed in the possibility of removing some of the prejudices against Christianity, by showing what its doctrines really were, and how even the sublimest of its mysteries had been shadowed forth in the speculations of celebrated men ;* how they had been divinely, though dimly, revealed by prophets, and proved by the connected proceed-

* Apol. i. sec. 59.

ings of the Almighty fulfilling their predictions ; and exhibited in clear, refulgent light by the blessed gospel itself.

The application of heavenly grace to the individual believer is then described by the Apologist.* “We will now explain,” he says, “in what manner, having been made new by Christ, we have offered up ourselves to God ; lest, by omitting this, we should seem to have done something wrong in giving our account. Whosoever, then, is persuaded, and faithfully believes, that those things which we teach are true, and who also professes to be able to live accordingly, is instructed to pray, and, with fasting, to ask of God the remission of his sins, we joining with him both in fasting and supplication. This being done, he is conducted by us to a place where there is water, and is regenerated according to the manner in which we ourselves were regenerated. For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of all, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they receive the washing of water ; Christ indeed having said, ‘Unless ye be regenerated, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ But we cannot enter a second time into our mother’s womb, and be born. And thus the prophet Isaiah has described how they who have sinned, but repent, escape iniquity :— ‘Wash you ; make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil, learn to do well.’† So, being ignorant of our natural birth, and growing up in wicked and corrupt manners, in order that we may not remain the children of mere necessity and ignorance, we obtain, by water, the remission of our former sins. Upon him who has sought to be regenerated, and who has repented of his sins, is named the name of God the Father and sovereign of all ; this name alone being pro-

* Apol. i. sec. 61.

† Isaiah i. 16.

nounced, and such penitents as these alone being led to the washing. And this washing is called *illumination*, the understanding of those who learn these things being as it were enlightened. And in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed beforehand all things concerning Jesus, is he who is illuminated washed."

Having spoken of the wicked imitations of this baptism, introduced at the suggestion of evil spirits, Justin continues his account of the method pursued with the newly-baptized believer:—"After we have thus washed the believer, who has declared his assent to our doctrine, we lead him to those who are called brethren; and who, being assembled together, join in common prayer for each other, and especially for him, the newly-illuminated one; and for all others, wherever dwelling, who love holiness, that we ourselves may be counted worthy of learning those things which are true, and may be found, by our deeds, good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. When we have finished praying, we salute with the kiss of charity; and then bread, and a cup of water and wine* are presented to him who presides over the brethren; and he, taking these, gives praise and glory to the Father of all, through the name of his Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and a solemn act of thanksgiving† is performed for the gifts which he has bestowed. The prayers and the Eucharist being ended, all the people pronounce, with a joyful voice, *Amen!*‡ And the president having prayed, and

* Sec. 65. The word *κραμα*, used in the original, signifies, strictly, not wine, but a mixture of wine and water.

† Or *Eucharist*, the word in the original.

‡ The original signifies that it was uttered by the congregation with great fervour and strength of voice.

the congregation having finished their glad acclams, those who are called deacons among us give to every one present a portion of the Eucharistic bread, and of the wine and water, and they bear it afterwards to those who are not present."

We have here a very clear account, though but incidentally given, of the most important of the rites performed in the Christian congregations of the second century. From the following passage we also learn the first and most necessary condition on which the privilege of admission to communion was allowed:—"And this food," says Justin, "we call *Eucharist*; and of this it is unlawful for any one to taste, unless he believe the doctrines which we teach, and be washed with the washing which is for the remission of sins, and for regeneration, and live according to the precepts of Christ. For it is not as common bread, it is not as common drink, that we receive the Eucharistic food; but as by the word of God Jesus Christ our Saviour was made flesh, and took flesh and blood for our salvation, so also the food which is rendered Eucharistic, through the prayer of the word which is from him, and from which our blood and flesh are nourished, becomes, we are taught, the flesh and the blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For so the apostles, in those their memorials which are called gospels, have related, that Christ gave commandment; for that, taking bread and giving thanks, he said, '*This do in remembrance of me; this is my body:*' and that, taking the cup likewise, and giving thanks, he said, '*This is my blood;*' and that he gave it to them only."*

Then follows an account of the more ordinary customs of the brotherhood.—"We continue, in after times, to remind each other of our initiation; those among us who

* Apol. i. sec. 16.

are wealthy rendering aid to the needy, and each with each living in brotherly harmony. And in all our offerings we bless the Maker of all things, through Jesus Christ his Son, and through the Holy Spirit. And on the day which is called Sunday, all the brethren from the various towns and villages meet together in a certain place, and read either the memorials of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets, as long as there is time. And when he who reads has finished, the president admonishes and exhorts the people to imitate the noble things which they have heard. Then we all rise together and utter prayers; and, as we have before said, prayers being ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and he who presides, pours forth aloud supplications and thanksgivings, the congregation pronouncing, Amen! This is followed by a distribution and communication of the Eucharistic elements to every one present, a portion being conveyed to those who are absent by the deacons. Such of the congregation as are wealthy and willing give according to their several ability. That which is collected is deposited with the president, and he renders therewith assistance to the orphans and widows, and to those who are sick, or who are afflicted from any other cause, and to poor strangers; in a word, care is taken of all who are in anywise necessitous. On the Sunday we have a common assembly, because that is the first day on which God, having wrought with* darkness and matter, created the world; and on that same day Jesus Christ our Saviour arose from the dead. For they crucified him on the day before Saturday, and on the day after Saturday, that is, on Sunday, appearing to his apostles and disciples, he taught those things which we have here delivered for your consideration.”†

* Literally, *having turned*.

† Apol. i. sec. 61.

The description which Justin has thus given of Christian worship answers, in the main, to that afforded by Pliny's letter to Trajan, written about sixty years before. They both intimate that the Eucharistic feast was a principal rite in the early assemblies of devout believers. That prayer employed a large portion of the time allowed for the public services is equally evident from both accounts ; but Justin tells us, in addition, that in his age the Scriptures were regularly read in these meetings, and that the chief minister present delivered a discourse on the subjects spoken of in the Divine word.

It is cause of great thankfulness to the serious inquirer, that so clear and authentic an account exists of primitive Christian worship. We learn therefrom, that the observances of our own churches are closely, if not exactly—in spirit, if not in letter—conformable to the best examples of antiquity. There was plainly an order observed in the conduct of the ancient services. A distinct reference was at all times made to the terms of the evangelical covenant ; for none were admitted to share in the communion of Christians, who had not openly vowed fidelity to Christ. The closest bond of brotherhood united the members of the congregation together, and the customs of the church were so framed as to make this continually apparent. Charity was brought into the church—her claims were heard and answered there. The high and low, the rich and poor, met not as strangers, but as the children of one Father, and as supplicants, all equally necessitous, for the grace and bounty of a common benefactor. There the wealthy proved the sincerity of their profession by the liberality of their contributions ; the afflicted in spirit and the broken-hearted were soothed by the voice of brotherly affection ; and the virtues and powers spoken of in the gospel were at once, and substantially, set forth in the united and

heart-felt thanksgivings of the whole assembly as the family of God.

A fearful change has taken place in the relation of Christians to each other, and from this plain and palpable cause, the terms of Christian communion are now so indefinite, that it is not always easy to tell who is really a Christian and who is not. An unlimited confidence, an uninquiring charity, therefore, can no longer be exercised. But the principle remains unimpaired so far as the members of a congregation are really Christians. Genuine faith and true spirituality are as much a bond of union as they ever were. The coldness and indifference which now exist among the worshippers of God, are the consequence of that almost fatal facility with which the most thoughtless and sensual of mankind are admitted to communion ; and as their profession is no certain proof of their evangelical character, other evidences, a longer and more severely tested experience, must precede that full outpouring of brotherly affection which characterized, from the first, the intercourse of the primitive Christians. But this evidence of truth and sincerity being afforded, the church again rises before us in life and substance, and looks and speaks, as far as the communion of its members is concerned, as it did in the earliest times. Spiritual prayer is the language with which it still appeals to Heaven : Scripture is the oracle by which the answer to inquiries of highest moment is given as before ; piety, experience, thought, and sanctified ability, were regarded from the first, and are regarded still, as necessary in their several proportions, to the useful exposition of the divine word ; and it was considered then as now, that by far the larger number of Christians were little likely to discover for themselves the whole of the truth revealed in Scripture, and that one

portion of the church's service, therefore, ought always to consist in the unfolding and establishing of the great doctrines of the faith, according to the best ascertained sense of the divine word.

Thus, did no other ancient writer exist, we should be able to ascertain from Justin Martyr that the worship of Christians was at the first conducted on the same plan as it is among ourselves ; that their religious assemblies aimed at the same end, and by the same means ; and that, consequently, when we are met together in the house of prayer, we may indulge in the sublime feeling that by our brotherly love, by our devotions, and our exercises of thought and faith, we are proving our immediate union, our personal membership with Christ's Universal Church, in whatever age, or in whatever clime, we live.

The zeal and eloquence of Justin appear to have obtained the desired reward. His efforts were seconded by numerous addresses sent from Christians in the provinces of Asia Minor most subject to the outbreaks of the people, or the petty tyranny of the magistrates. The emperor is said to have yielded to the powerful representations thus made to his justice and clemency.* For a time the persecution was suppressed ; but instances were continually occurring which proved that believers had no real protection against the wickedness of their oppressors. Some female of rank, and high character for virtue and intelligence, had found it necessary to seek the aid of the magistrate against the barbarous and gross outrages of her husband. The misery of her condition was too clearly shown to admit of a doubt respecting the propriety of her claiming public protection. The decision was accordingly

* Eusebius, lib. iv. c. xii. xiii.

given in her favour. Her husband, leaving Alexandria, where he was living a life of debauchery, hastened to Rome, and accused her of being a Christian. Not denying her faith, she made a counter-appeal to the emperor, and was again successful. The enraged husband now turned his fury against those from whom she had received instruction in the gospel. A pious teacher, named Ptolomæus, was apprehended at his instigation, and held in close confinement by a centurion, bribed to execute his designs. When carried before the prefect Urbicius, Ptolomæus at once confessed himself a Christian, and was immediately sentenced to die. One of the bystanders, yielding to the generous indignation which filled his heart at this instance of tyranny, turning to the judge, exclaimed, "How is it, Urbicius, that you have condemned this man to death? He has been guilty of no crime: he has committed neither murder nor theft, nor any other offence: he has only declared 'that he bears the name of Christian.' Is your sentence in accordance with the will of the emperor, or the senate?" Urbicius replied: "It seems to me that you, too, belong to this herd." Lucius instantly exclaimed, "I do:" and was as quickly ordered out to execution. Unterrified at approaching death, he told Urbicius that he rejoiced to hear the sentence passed upon him, for that it would set him free from the wicked rulers of this world, and open his way to the Father and King of heaven. His example gave courage to another Christian to confess his faith in similar terms; and he also was immediately condemned to death.*

It was this occurrence which led Justin to compose his second Apology, a composition much shorter than the first, but urging in the same earnest spirit the main

* Justin Martyr, Op. p. 89.

arguments which truth and right reason furnish for the defence of Christianity. He observes, at the commencement of this address, that he expected soon to be himself a victim to the malice of those who hated the gospel for its holiness and simplicity ;* and in the conclusion,† he says, “ I confess that it is my glory to be a Christian, and I confess it with prayer, and with a readiness to endure all toil and contention for my faith.”

The two Apologies were both written before
 A. D. the Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Some other
 167. works, of importance at the time, also appeared from the pen of Justin ; and he thus became the most conspicuous man in the age as a defender of Christian truth. The machinations of his enemies were unceasing ; and they at length found means to secure his apprehension. Being led before Rusticus, the prefect of Rome, he was asked to what kind of learning he had devoted himself. “ I have examined,” he answered, “ every species of doctrine, and have finally adopted that of the Christians, little as it pleases those who delight in error.” After some further questioning, the prefect said, “ Thou art a Christian then.” And Justin immediately answered in the affirmative.

Several other believers had been apprehended with Justin, and were now standing before the tribunal of the prefect. Each was examined as to his faith, and the origin of his conversion. The greatest caution marked the answers given. A slight imprudence might have involved whole congregations in peril, and subjected the most useful of their members to immediate destruction.

When the prefect had finished his inquiries of the rest, he again turned to Justin, and said, “ Do you, who are esteemed wise and eloquent, believe that when you have

* Sec. iii.

† Sec. xiii.

been scourged, and your head is rolling at your feet, you will then ascend to heaven?" "I believe," replied Justin, "that if I so suffer, I shall be a partaker of the grace of God with those who have before kept the commandments of Jesus Christ." "Do you imagine then," continued the prefect, "that you will rise to heaven and there receive some reward?" "I do not imagine it," was the immediate reply. "I know it!"

Impatient at the firmness thus displayed, Rusticus exclaimed, "It is enough. Let us consider the business we have more immediately in hand. Prepare yourselves, and sacrifice among each other to the gods." "No reasonable man," answered Justin, "will forsake piety to embrace wickedness and error." The prefect continued: "If you despise our commands, you shall be tortured without mercy." "We desire," replied Justin, "to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ. We desire nothing so much; for it will give us confidence when we stand before his terrible tribunal." In the expression of this sentiment the other confessors joyfully agreed, and all declared their wish to be at once led to execution. "We are Christians," they exclaimed, "and we will not sacrifice to idols."

Led forth by the guards, Justin and his companions were first subjected to the most cruel scourging, and then beheaded, their remains being afterwards carried away by the Christians, and secretly interred.*

* Acta Martyr. Sincer.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD—PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL—
CHANGE IN THE CONDUCT OF MARCUS AURELIUS TOWARDS THE
CHRISTIANS—THE THUNDERING LEGION—MARTYRS OF LYONS
AND VIENNE—IRENÆUS.

THE power which the gospel exercised on many minds of the highest class may be seen from the incidents already described. But men of noble intellect and generous affections never make discoveries in truth for themselves only. They no sooner feel their own strength and happiness increased, than they desire to enrich others by the means which they have themselves tried and proved available. Nor is the wish or experiment a vain one. The truth which has converted this or that heart seems to gain so much additional power from its fresh combination with human instincts and sympathies. Each mind subdued to its gracious influences is to it a triumphal car, erect on which it passes through admiring crowds, ready to own the majesty of its looks, and, sooner or later, to confess its right to command.

Had the Christian church possessed a machinery calculated to act on the mass of mankind, the progress of the gospel would have given less proof of its Divine origin. But it is well worthy of observation, that Christianity had no engines ready fitted to the power of the spirit which gave it life. It had to create them for itself, and the greatest of all the many wonders which its establishment offers to our notice is this—that, dealing with the most opposite powers of human nature, it brought them all as a single element to execute its own designs.

• From the memorials existing of the church in the first and second century, we may fairly conclude that, as an institution, it had as little to do with the world as any institution of which it is possible for us to form an idea. If we may trust to the description given of its rites and ordinances by those who contemplated them in the earliest times, no aim whatever was made by its ministers to attract the attention or win the admiration of the world. Its sacraments, as distinctly spoken of, were performed with little ceremony. The objects to which they referred were spiritual, sublime, and heavenly ; but they could excite no worldly imagination—could scarcely appear to a common mind invested with any degree of their native and essential dignity. So far, indeed, were the members and ministers of the church from desiring to make the world a spectator of their proceedings, that their very separation and retiredness were continually spoken of as furnishing a just reason for the hatred of their enemies. But this could not have been the case, had the church been provided with means and power like a political institution, for assailing the world and making a conquest of its children. In this respect it was weak and helpless. It was among its own only that it sat as a queen. It was to them it opened its recesses ; for them it treasured the riches of heavenly truth. From the world it shrunk, silent and sad. Opposition, hatred, and ridicule beset its path. The very thought of a compromise with this its enemy would have been sin. Its holy mysteries could not be subjected to modification ; they were as unchangeable as eternal truth. The church was but the depository of revealed doctrine. It had no right over the divine treasure but that of a trustee or a steward. Whatever might have been its own will to meet the world half-way, the

nature of its charge absolutely prohibited it ; and, as far as we can judge from history, it made no attempt during its earlier ages to break the law, or overcome the necessity, imposed upon it.

But while the church, as an institution, or a society, remained in its own entireness separate from the world, it did not exist, or carry on its services, or look forward from seasons of difficulty and tribulation, to those of triumph, as standing in no relation to the world. It consisted of God's chosen people. The splendours of heavenly righteousness and love were concentrated in its bosom ; and the light within it was the very antagonist of the darkness that was without. But the sun in the heavens has been set there not for its own glory, but that it may give light to the world ; and the law which prohibits the faintest of its rays from mingling with darkness, the decree which has ordained its perpetual opposition to the obscurity and the unwholesome vapours of the earth, is one of the most benign pronounced by the wise and loving Creator. And thus too is it with the church of the first-born.* It was placed, from the first, in direct antagonism to the world. The spirit which animated it ; the rules whereby it was to act ; the path which had been opened for its progress ; each declared that it was set as a fortress in the midst of a hostile country ; that it was to wage unceasing war with the world. But both Scripture and the analogies of nature indicated that it was not for destruction, but for salvation, not for evil, but for good, that this hostile power was constituted, and the war begun. The church was to remain separate and solitary. None but those who had sworn fidelity to its Lord were to be admitted within its gates : none were to be received

* Heb. xii. 23.

to whom the watchword had not been communicated. But from this little fortress were to go forth the best friends of mankind,—preachers of truth and righteousness ; men who, carrying the blessing of God with them, and in their own hearts, were resolved rather to lay down their lives than not communicate to the world the gospel call to repentance, and the offer of peace and salvation.

It is of some importance to understand that it was not by a general movement of the whole body, by any influence, that is, exercised by the Christian church as an institution, that the work of conversion was carried on. Cities and provinces were evangelized not by the church itself, but by messengers and ministers of the church. They carried with them indeed the doctrines of the church. It was the power of the church which gave them authority, and the blessing of the church cheered them on their distant and hazardous path. But it was as strangers and pilgrims that they preached the gospel ; and hence the wonder of their success. Humanly considered, the agents employed were utterly inadequate to produce the effects which attended their course. They were weak and fallible, but sinful men became sons of God from listening to the truths which they had to declare.

St. Paul himself was astonished as he contemplated the progress of the gospel in his own times. “ I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed ; through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of God ; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.”* The Spirit which led him and his associates

* Rom. xv. 18, 19.

forth, to accomplish these wonders, was the same as that which inspired their successors. No sooner had the prouder cities, and more cultivated provinces of the empire, been made acquainted with the truth, than missionaries arose to carry it into lands, remote at that period from the haunts of science and civilization.

Justin, in speaking of this subject, says, that in his time there was not a single race existing among whom prayers and thanksgivings were not offered up in the name of the crucified Jesus.* According to the terms which he employs, the barbarians and Nomade tribes of the north now owned the divinity of the Saviour; and that this was really the case is further illustrated by the testimony of Irenæus, who, in asserting the universality of the true doctrine of the gospel, speaks of the churches established among the Germans and the Celts, as well as of those in Iberia, Egypt, and Lybia.† Tertullian, again, who lived but a little later, says, that not only did the several people who had representatives at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost now know the gospel, but also the Getulians; the Mauritanians; the remotest inhabitants of Spain; the various nations of Gaul; the districts of Britain, inaccessible to the Romans; those, equally inaccessible, of the Sarmatians, Dacians, Germans, Scythians; and hidden, unknown tribes, provinces, and islands, which could scarcely be numbered; all had heard and received the religion of Christ.‡

How impossible is it to form an adequate conception of the labours and perils which must have been endured by those faithful disciples of the blessed Jesus, through whom the gospel was first preached to these distant people!

* Dialog. cum Trypho, sec. 117. Op. p. 211.

† Lib. i. c. 3.

‡ Apol. sec. xxxvii.

The only approach which we can make to a real understanding of their character, is that afforded by general representations of Christian zeal and devotion. If the great mass of believers demonstrated by holiness of life, by the fervent love of God, by the active exercise of the noblest of virtues, the present power of the divine Spirit, it is easy to conceive how sublime must have been the heroism of those who, in the maturity of their evangelical experience, could voluntarily deprive themselves of the peaceful joys of communion with their brethren, and go forth into the wilderness, and devote the best and the last years of their life to the teaching of a rude and barbarous people.

Impenetrable obscurity hangs over the history of those great and holy men who followed the steps of the apostles as missionaries. It would seem as if they had shunned any memorial of their labours ; or as if those who loved them with the dearest affection had refused to record their names, lest it might be said of them, by him whose favour and praise alone they sought, " Verily they have their reward." But little as we can tell of the manner in which the work of evangelizing the world was then carried on, the very fact that many of the fiercest and most unenlightened tribes were converted and humanized by means of the gospel, is a sufficient proof of the power of divine grace, and of the wisdom and holiness of those who, with nothing but that grace to aid them, dare venture on so perilous an undertaking.

The more ancient churches—portions of the one evangelical church—having thus sent out their missionaries and representatives, had the satisfaction of seeing other churches planted by their means, and soon after rising

and flourishing as living witnesses to the power of the Spirit.

A. D.
177. Among the new communities then established, one of the most conspicuous was that of Lyons in Gaul. Pothinus and Irenæus were very early connected with this church, and had probably some share in its foundation. They both of them learnt the gospel from the immediate scholars of the apostles in Asia Minor. The neighbouring church of Vienne on the Rhone arose about the same time, and the two communities kept up so close and brotherly a union, that they soon became regarded but as one.

A brief season of tranquillity, such as the Christians had rarely enjoyed, followed the persecutions encouraged by Marcus Aurelius in the early part of his reign. This may be ascribed, in great measure, to the noble apologies presented by Justin and others, among whom may be mentioned Meliton, bishop of Sardis.* But the change in the emperor's policy has been also attributed to an event, the accounts of which are involved in some obscurity. According, however, to ancient chronicles, Marcus Aurelius, in the year 174, being engaged against the Quadi, a warlike people, in the remotest parts of Germany, found himself and his army suddenly exposed to unlooked-for dangers. Surrounded by forests and mountains, he in vain sought to penetrate into the open country. To add to the difficulties of his position, the troops were fainting with thirst under a burning sun ; while the barbarians from the neighbouring heights, and the recesses of the woods, appeared every instant to threaten them with indiscriminate slaughter. A panic seized the breasts of the

* Eusebius, lib. iv. c. 26.

Romans ; and they were ready to give themselves up to despair, when, to their amazement, several of their comrades fell upon their knees, and with clasped hands, and loud voices, prayed to God, in the name of Christ, to deliver the emperor and his army from the impending destruction.*

Astonished at the scene, the enemy paused in their attack. Suddenly, the sky became overspread with clouds ; large and heavy drops of rain began to fall ; and the panting soldiers held out their hands or their helmets to catch the precious moisture. But soon the shower increased. The rain poured down in torrents ; and as it fell, a fierce storm of thunder and lightning seemed to shake the very mountains with its fury. Thrown into utter confusion by the unexpected tempest, the barbarians forsook their strong-holds ; and the Romans, filled with more than wonted strength, passed safely through the defiles into the plain.

Not alone did the Christian soldiers ascribe this remarkable event to the prayers which they had offered up. A large portion of the army, and, if the ancient chronicles speak true, the emperor himself, openly acknowledged that it was to the God of the Christians they owed their deliverance. The soldiers, whose prayers had been found so efficacious, were drafted into a band, called the *thundering legion* ; the name of which was long considered as descriptive of the event thus recorded.

Whether the conduct of Marcus Aurelius was really influenced, as tradition reports, by his supposed miraculous deliverance, may be fairly questioned.† But certain it is

* Eusebius Eccles. Hist. lib. v. c. 5.

† A long controversy has been held upon the subject ; and the mode in which Eusebius himself speaks is alleged as justifying the

that some powerful influence must have been exercised on his mind to render it, even for a season, tolerant of the gospel. Men of his character are not induced to give up opinions, or change their purposes, by persuasion, or ordinary appeals to their sense of justice or humanity. Nothing, probably, but some startling, some supernatural witness, as it might seem, to the truth and divinity of the Christian's faith, would have saved him from the stern sentence of his imperial persecutor.

If, therefore, we may judge of causes from effects, the remarkable change in the conduct of Marcus towards the church, argues strongly in favour of the tradition respecting the thundering legion. Unhappily, another circumstance may be alleged in proof of this view of his proceedings. The conviction which arises from prodigies or miracles has ever more the nature of passion than of faith. Hence, the blessed Jesus employed his wonderful power in marked subjection to the Spirit which was to inspire belief, having first purified and converted. Supposing that Marcus Aurelius was really delivered by the prayers of the Christian soldiers, he could not but own the power of the God to whom they appealed. The clouds which suddenly gathered along the face of the sultry heavens—the rain as it fell upon the almost maddened legions—the portentous lightnings, which terrified the barbarians who

doubts entertained. He alludes to it indeed as a report; and he ends his narrative by leaving every one to judge of it as he may think fit. From the general tone, however, of the recital, there seems little doubt but that he considered the tradition as far more deserving of credit than some modern authors have deemed it. The very learned Herman Witsius has defended the truth of the narrative with great vigour. Both Mosheim *De Rebus Christ. ante Constant.* p. 248, and Lardner, *Works*, vol. vii. p. 438, have given a useful abstract of the arguments on both sides.

had laughed at the power of Rome—all indicated the presence and interference of Divinity; and the wise heathen yielded himself to the impression which his own early education in superstition and fable would rather favour than contradict. But nothing is more evanescent than feelings thus excited. We accordingly find that, after a few years, Marcus Aurelius either imperceptibly withdrew his protection from the Christians, or conceived some new prejudice against them too powerful for any sentiment which one or two remarkable occurrences had been sufficient to inspire.

The first of the evangelical communities which experienced the returning terrors of persecution, were those of Lyons and Vienne. At the time of which we are speaking, they were conspicuous for their advancement in Christian holiness; for the purity of their doctrine, and their steadfast perseverance in the open profession of the truth. Having sprung, through the labours of missionaries, from the churches of Asia Minor, they continued to hold intercourse with them as faithful and affectionate children.

No sooner, therefore, were the flames of persecution rekindled, than they sent messengers with an epistle to the churches of Asia and Phrygia, describing the sufferings which they had been called upon to endure. This epistle still exists, and forms a valuable part of the treasure of early ecclesiastical history.*

“The servants of Christ at Vienne and Lyons, of Gaul, to their brethren in Asia and Phrygia, having the same faith and hope of redemption, peace, grace, and glory from God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Having thus addressed their brethren,” says Eusebius, “they pro-

* Eusebius, lib. v. c. 1.

ceed with their relation :”—“Such is the greatness of our affliction here ; such the rage of the heathen against the saints ; and the sufferings endured by the blessed martyrs, that we can neither express nor describe them. The enemy fell upon us with all his force, indicating, at the beginning, what we had to expect from his coming. And he left nothing undone, but diligently exercised and disciplined his people against the servants of God. Thus we were prohibited from frequenting the houses of our friends, from appearing at the baths, or in the market-place ; and not only from these places were we banished, but from every other that can be named. But the grace of God warred on our side against the enemy. Those who were weak, it delivered ; and such as were strong it set up as firm pillars, which, becoming mighty through endurance, could sustain the whole weight of the enemy's onset. And these encountering him, bore every kind of reproof and contumely, and regarding such things as worthy of little consideration, they hastened to Christ ; showing truly that ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.’* ”

“And, in the first instance, they nobly sustained the attacks of the multitude, rushing in a mass upon them. They endured their fierce shoutings ; the blows and wounds which they inflicted ; they bore the spoiling of their goods, imprisonment, and every thing, in short, which a maddened populace are accustomed to inflict upon those whom they hate. After having thus suffered from the multitude, they were conducted by the chiliarch and the magistrates into the Forum. There being subjected to an examination in the presence of all the people, they confessed themselves Christians, and were immedi-

* Rom. viii. 18.

ately ordered to prison, there to be kept till the arrival of the president.”*

On the appearance of that officer, the Christians were brought from their place of confinement, and again examined as to their faith and principles. Such was the violence and barbarity with which the process was carried on, that one of the brethren, Vettius Epagathus, in vain endeavoured to suppress the indignation which filled his heart. He was still little more than a youth, but his zeal, the severity of his life and manners, softened only by the fervour of his charity, rendered him, in the eyes of his fellow-believers, equal to the saints of old.

Approaching the tribunal, he raised his voice, and desired permission to act as the advocate of his brethren. “They have committed no crime,” he exclaimed: “they are guilty of no impiety.” But the sound of his words was soon stifled by the vociferations of the bystanders. “He is himself a Christian!” was heard from a hundred tongues; and the judge, without delay, condemned him to death. Others shared the same speedy martyrdom; and their example encouraged new candidates for the glory and blessedness of a perfected faith to make, like them, an open confession of their religion. Some, unhappily, in this, as in earlier persecutions, fell away. They were ten in number; but their place, we are told, was quickly supplied by others more mature in faith and courage. The fear that the hearts of the people might fail, in the extremity of their alarm, had spread a general

* This president is by some supposed to have been Severus, afterwards emperor. The word president, or that to which it answers in the original, has a general signification, and is applied in common to governors of provinces, procurators, proconsuls, and legates.—Valesius, n. in Euseb. lib. v. c. 4.

gloom over the church. But the apprehension vanished when it was seen how, by the very diligence of the persecutors, the most enlightened and advanced of the brethren, and those best able to endure the trial, were brought together, and placed as a sort of rampart between the enemy and the less experienced believers.

Among those against whom the wrath both of the populace and of the president was now chiefly directed, were Sanctus, deacon of Vienne ; Maturus, who is described as only newly baptized,* but a noble combatant ; Attalus, a native of Pergamus, spoken of as a pillar and foundation-stone of the church at Lyons, and Blandina, through whom, it is said, 'Christ made known that those things which are least esteemed, and most destitute of excellence in the sight of men, are with God worthy of honour and glory, for that love which they have towards him, and which is manifested with power, and not by the boasting of outward beauty.'

Blandina was a slave, but tenderly beloved by her mistress, a Christian lady, who herself subsequently suffered martyrdom. Sickness, or years, had weakened Blandina's frame ; and it was greatly feared that the sufferings with which she was threatened would overpower her resolution. But though, from the dawn of day till evening, every species of torture was employed to force her to recant, she retained her wonted strength and cheerfulness of spirit ; exclaiming, at each new turn of the rack, "I am a Christian, and the Christians are guilty of no crime."

Thus sustaining and conquering her agony, Blandina was reserved for another day. A public spectacle had

* The word used in the original of the narrative signifies *newly illuminated*.—Eusebius, lib. v. c. 4.

been especially appointed, it is said, for the purpose of indulging the multitude with a sight of the Christians exposed to the wild beasts. Blandina was led forth with her companions, Attalus, Maturus, and Sanctus. Of these, the first was a Roman citizen, and the magistrate ordered him back to prison. The other two were placed in the iron-chair, a frightful instrument of torture, in which the body of the sufferer was exposed to a heat equal to that of a slow furnace. Having endured this for a time, they were next subjected to other agonies, and finally put to death. Blandina, in the mean while, was suspended to a species of gibbet, in the form of a cross ; and still manifested, to the joy and wonder of her fellow-believers, the same calmness, the same delight in the truth of the gospel for which she was suffering. At length, the wild beasts were let in. They approached, but did not touch her ; and again she was consigned to the dungeon. There she lingered till the last day of the spectacles, when she was once more brought forth, and with her a youth, about fifteen years of age, named Ponticus. They were both tried by every species of torture. The people beheld with astonishment, but without pity, the agonies endured by these two martyrs—the one a mere boy, the other a poor, emaciated woman. At each fresh infliction, the same fervent declaration of faith in Jesus fell from their lips. Ponticus died first. Blandina seemed to strive against death, that she might continue to encourage and comfort her youthful companion in the dreadful struggle till he fell asleep. Scourging, the iron-chair, exposure to the wild beasts, were all endured by this heroic woman. At last she was enclosed in a net, and cast before a wild bull. Gored by the raging animal, and pierced through

with a sword, she yielded up her spirit ; the very heathen confessing that they had never witnessed a nobler spectacle of constancy and fortitude.

According to the rescript of the emperor, those who acknowledged themselves Christians were to be put to death, while such as denied their faith might be set free. To the great consolation of the brethren generally, some of those who had shrunk from the prospect of death, and had obtained a temporary reprieve, found their courage return in prison, and now gladly proclaimed their readiness to suffer for the gospel.* The noble-minded Attalus, whom the president feared to expose to the wild beasts, because he was a Roman, also suffered at this time, and the same variety of torture as the rest of the martyrs. Pothinus, the beloved and venerable bishop of this persecuted church, though ninety years of age, was rudely dragged before the tribunal. His tottering limbs could scarcely support him, but his heart was animated by more than youthful courage ; and when the magistrate asked him, " Who is the God of the Christians ? " He answered, " If you be worthy, you shall know." Those of the bystanders who were nearest, immediately assailed him with their fists ; while they who could not reach him in this way, flung at him whatever they could lay hold of at the moment ; every one, it is said, seeming to consider that it was a matter of duty and religion to take some part in insulting the aged bishop. This exercise of po-

* They and others who were weak and hesitating were greatly animated, when before the tribunal, by the persuasions of a Phrygian physician, named Alexander, who being observed, was himself called to answer for his faith, and soon after put to death by torture.—Eusebius, lib. v. c. 4.

pular fury saved Pothinus from worse treatment. Fainting under the blows of his persecutors, he was cast into prison, and, after two days, expired.

So awfully had the minds of the people been imbued with hatred against the Christians, that the tortures which they suffered availed but in few instances to satiate the thirst for vengeance. The bodies of those who had been strangled in prison were thrown to the dogs ; while the remains of such as had been tortured in the amphitheatre, and were half devoured by the wild beasts, were first exposed to public view, and then burnt, their ashes being cast into the Rhone, in order, as the benighted persecutors intimated, to prevent the possibility of their resurrection, according to the Christian's hope.

Political events, capricious changes in the views or dispositions of the emperors ; new appointments in the local magistracy, with other similar causes, tended, no doubt, on this as on other occasions, to shorten the continuance of the persecution. Thus many, it appears, were delivered who had prepared themselves to die : and among those who left the prison for their homes instead of the amphitheatre, were several whose bodies still exhibited the scorching of the fire to which they had been exposed, and the wounds, yet bleeding, which had been inflicted on them by the ministers of torture.

To these confessors, the brethren were fond of applying the title of martyrs. But it is recorded, as illustrative of their humility, that they resisted such attempts to exalt them ; and observed, with severity, that the title of martyr was, in the first instance, proper to Christ alone, the true and faithful witness, and the first-born from the dead, the prince and author of celestial life ; that they also might be called martyrs, who had sealed the pro-

fession of faith by their death, as with a ring ; but that, for themselves, they were only poor and miserable confessors.

*Their charity, it is added, was equal to their humility. They accused no one. Like the blessed Stephen, they prayed for their worst enemies ; and, instead of bearing themselves haughtily towards the lapsed, or shutting them out from the hope of reconciliation, they treated them with the tenderness of a loving parent, and ceased not to entreat the Almighty to pity and save them.

The faith and unshaken devotion exhibited by the church at Lyons and Vienne, are not spoken of in the early records from which we have drawn our narrative, as peculiar to the Christians of those cities. On the contrary, it is expressly said, that, from what took place in this part of the empire, we may form our judgment respecting the state of the Christians generally. It was scarcely possible, indeed, that any great difference should exist between the condition of one portion of the church and that of another at this period. The laws and institutions of Rome ; the universal prevalence of mythological religions among the people ; the jealousy of magistrates, and the injured pride of philosophers, contributed, in a nearly equal degree, through the whole extent of the provinces, to create hostility to the gospel. But such being the case, how evident it is, that as the church instead of decreasing was daily enlarging its boundaries, the zeal and holiness of its members must have been sufficient to sustain the fiercest onset of its enemies. And if so, no less manifest is it to a candid mind, that such a zeal and such holiness, a fortitude and devotion, that is, capable of enduring persecutions like those above described, must have been the gift of a divine Spirit, endowing the hearts of men with heavenly

virtues, that they might be able to contend and overcome in the cause of heaven.

At the time when the Christians of Lyons were exposed to so terrible a trial of their constancy, Irenæus, celebrated alike for his labours, his sufferings, and his writings, was one of the presbyters of the afflicted community. Happily for the church, his life was spared, and it was by him that the brethren made known to Eleutherus, the then bishop of Rome, the conflict in which they had been engaged.* This venerable man was born about the year 120, and placed, while still a child, under the instruction of St. Polycarp. It was the great delight of Irenæus in after years to recall the words and looks of his beloved master. "I recollect," he says, "the things which happened when I was a boy better than those of later years, for that which we learn in childhood grows up with the mind itself, and abides in it. Thus I am able to tell the very spot in which the blessed Polycarp used to sit and talk; his going out and coming in; his mode of living; his personal appearance; the discourses which he addressed to the people; the account which he gave of his conversations with St. John, and with others who had seen the Lord; and of what had been told him concerning the Lord, his miracles and doctrine, by eye-witnesses of the word of life, and all which were in perfect agreement with the Scriptures. The things which, by the mercy of God, happened at that time, I diligently attended to, and recorded them, not on paper, but in my heart, and I still continually, by the grace of God, meditate upon them."†

This fragment is valuable as showing how the holy men who lived in the early times transmitted from one to the

* Eusebius, lib. v. c. 4.

† Epis. ad Florin. Op. p. 339.

other the pure doctrine of Christ. It ought also to be observed, that Irenæus makes particular mention of the exact agreement between all that Polycarp said and Scripture. Such testimony to the supreme authority of the written word is of vast importance ; and did nothing else remain of the works of Irenæus, he would deserve to be regarded as one of the most useful of the early fathers.

It is supposed that it was at the desire of Polycarp that Irenæus left Smyrna for Gaul. His piety and knowledge could not but recommend him to the friendship of Pothinus, and by him he was admitted to the degree and office of presbyter. The expressions employed by the brethren, in their letter to Eleutherus, show how greatly he was esteemed by the whole community. "We pray you," they said, "to receive him with favour, for he is zealous for the covenant of Christ. But if we knew that place could confer righteousness on any one, we should have told you, in the first instance, that he is a presbyter of the church."*

Pothinus being dead, Irenæus was chosen to succeed him as chief pastor of the church at Lyons.† He soon found sufficient occupation for his active and zealous mind. Florinus and Blastus, both of them Roman presbyters, but under sentence of degradation, were busy in diffusing those novel doctrines which pleased men of an unspiritual temper so much better than the simplicity of the gospel. Irenæus, immediately on his return from Rome, began to oppose their heresies by a direct appeal to the testimony of Scripture, and of those who had conversed with Jesus Christ himself.

* Eusebius, lib. v. c. 4.

† Jerome : Catal. Illus. Viror. Irenæus.

We are not told to what degree he succeeded in overcoming the obstinacy of Florinus or Blastus ; but the necessity of continuing the labours thus commenced, and of systematically opposing the growth of heresy, became daily more evident. It was no longer sufficient for the pastor of a church to open the Scriptures, and teach his people what they contained, as a revelation from God. The father of lies was busy at his work, and the truths of the gospel had been anticipated by cunningly devised, and often to unconverted hearts most acceptable, fables. To explain the origin of these inventions ; to show with what purpose they were published, and their inconsistency with any doctrine purely revealed by God, thus became an important duty on the part of those who were qualified to perform it.

At first, the heretical teachers had been chiefly occupied with the wealthy and the learned. The gospel was employed so far as it might give novelty, or speciousness to their systems. Their ambition was encouraged by the attention which they secured, and the more substantial rewards of patronage followed, in various instances, their intercourse with the rich. Deplorable as it was to see these mischievous perverters of truth admitted among the great, and their wild reveries made the subject of grave discussion, the main body of Christ's people, the humble and faithful members of his church, were but little affected by their proceedings. This, however, did not continue to be the case. Some of the most dangerous opinions of the false teachers were now firmly established, and every day assumed a character more likely to disarm the caution of the people.

Irenæus saw clearly how essential it was, both to the present and future safety of the church, to raise some wall

of defence against the increasing danger. With this purpose in view, he began his celebrated work on the heresies most prevalent in his time. He desired, he says, to strip falsehood and error of their covering,* so that they who had been deceived by their outward appearance might, beholding them in their naked deformity, know their real nature, and the necessity of escaping from their snares. The work is divided into five books; and commences with an account of the system propounded by Valentinus. This, Irenæus regarded as containing the principles of all those other systems which, under a variety of names and forms, had arisen even in the apostolic age, and were now beginning to insinuate themselves among the members of the church.

The rise and progress of heresy is very clearly delineated in the work of Irenæus. But it has a value which the mere record of human error could never have given it. The lesson which such a history teaches may inspire us with fear and apprehension, but can hardly of itself lead to the knowledge of truth. It is otherwise when the sum of heavenly doctrine is exhibited in refulgent contrast to the wild and fruitless mysticism of erring minds. Hence the writings of Irenæus have a value not always duly appreciated. They describe with equal earnestness and simplicity the origin and character of the primitive creed. Nothing can be more opposed to fanaticism, pride, or superstition, than the simple account thus given of the diffusion of Christian knowledge, and of the increase of the church nourished by the pure waters of truth.

“The church,” says Irenæus, “though scattered over the whole habitable globe, to the very limits of the earth,

* Con. Hæreses, lib. i. c. 1.

receiving this faith from the apostles and their disciples, believes in one God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is : And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation. And in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed by the prophets the coming of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, his generation of the Virgin, his passion, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension in the flesh into heaven, and his coming again from the heavens in the glory of the Father, to gather together all things, and to raise all the flesh of all mankind, that to our Lord Jesus Christ, God and Saviour and King, according to the good pleasure of the invisible Father, every knee should bow of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess to him. And he will execute righteous judgment upon all ; and will send spiritual wickedness, and the angels who transgressed and became apostate, and impious and unjust, and wicked and blaspheming men, into eternal fire : but to the just and righteous, and to those who keep his precepts, and continue in his love, (some indeed from the beginning,) and some from repentance, will he freely impart life, and endow them with incorruption, and bestow upon them eternal glory.

“This preaching, and this faith,” continues Irenæus, “the church, as we have before said, though dispersed through all the world, as carefully guards as if it dwelt but in one house. And it believes these things even as having only one soul, and one and the same heart, and it declares and teaches and delivers them as possessing but one tongue. For although the languages of the world are various, the power of tradition is one and the same. And thus neither do the churches in Germany believe or pro-

claim aught otherwise than the churches in Spain, or Gaul, or the East, or in Africa, or in the middle regions of the world. But as the sun which God created is one and the same in all the world, so also appears everywhere the preaching of the truth, which illuminates all who desire to come unto the knowledge of its word. Nor may he who has authority in the church, and who is even very powerful in speech, say any thing different to that which is delivered ; for no one is above the Master. Nor will he who is feeble in speech lessen the tradition, for there being one and the same faith, neither does he who is able to say much concerning it increase it, nor he who can say but little diminish it.”*

This plain account of the doctrine of the church, and of the strictness with which it was guarded, affords little encouragement to the notion that traditions existed which had a truth and an authority independent of the Scriptures. The tradition spoken of by Irenæus was that which conveyed from apostolic times the sum of doctrine exhibited in the creed. And that creed, instead of extending its circle of doctrine beyond the limit of acknowledged revelation, has every appearance of having been kept most cautiously within it. It is but the most necessary articles of faith taught in Scripture which the Apostle's Creed contains ; so that instead of another series of traditions being required to perfect the Christian's belief, his own perfection seems to have been considered necessary to enable him to understand and embrace the written traditions of the apostles and evangelists. Irenæus, indeed, alludes, in the section following that above quoted, to the various degrees of knowledge and ability possessed by different preachers. Many are the subjects, he in-

* Cont. Hæres. lib. i. c. 10.

timates, which men, highly endowed, may speak of as illustrative of divine truth. But the truth itself—the foundation—the parent doctrine—must everlastingly remain the same. And hence, whatever the heights of grace or knowledge to which this or that man might advance, and however valuable he might be to the church as an expositor of its creed, he could not enlarge that creed, which in its highest and most perfect state of development must ever be referred to Scripture, and therefore never could exceed the limits of its revelation.

The accusation which Irenæus brought most powerfully against the heretics was this—that when confuted from Scripture, they asserted the imperfection of Scripture; and that when an appeal was made to that tradition which was from the apostles, and had been kept up in the churches through the succession of presbyters, they then opposed tradition, and proclaimed the superiority of their doctrines to those of the apostles, and even to the words of the Lord himself.*

But it is not altogether without entering into the deeper meaning of Scripture, or indulging in some degree of speculation respecting heavenly mysteries, that Irenæus pursues his argument against the heretics. Thus in confuting the doctrine of the soul's passage from one body to another—a favourite notion both with the ancient philosophers and the later heretics—he adduces the parable of Lazarus and the rich man; and thence draws the conclusion, according to the teaching of the Lord, that the soul does not exist by passing from one body into another, but that it preserves the peculiar form or character of the body to which it was first adapted; and that it remembers the actions and events of its life upon earth. Lazarus was

* Cont. Hæres. lib. iii. c. 2.

comforted and refreshed in the bosom of Abraham. They knew each other, and were known to Dives. Each had his proper place, and the ancient patriarch was evidently acquainted, not only with the things around him, but with the events of the rich man's life. Hence, says Irenæus again, it is manifest that the soul does not pass from one body to another, but that it has the human form, and may be recognized by others ; and that it remembers those things which are below ; that Abraham has the gift of prophecy ; and that the several classes of mankind, as good or evil, are received into habitations proper to their state even before the day of judgment.*

So also, in speaking of the fall of Adam, and of those who contended that he perished everlastingly, Irenæus argues, from a lively assurance of the mercy of God, that he would not allow the being whom he so peculiarly made in his image and likeness to become the permanent possession of Satan. Had he who was made a living soul never recovered from the wound inflicted on him by the serpent, God would have been conquered, and the iniquity of Satan would have overcome the will of the Most High. We spring from this Adam, that first-formed man, of whom the Lord said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ;" and because we have our origin from him we inherit his name. But if man be saved, he who was first made man must surely be saved. For it is hardly consistent with reason to suppose, that he who was so grievously wounded by the enemy, and first suffered captivity, was not delivered by him who conquered the enemy, but was left in bondage, while his children, born in his captivity, were set free. Nor, indeed, would the enemy appear to be conquered if he retained the most ancient of his

* Cont. Hæres. lib. ii. c. 34.

spoils. For it would be as if certain unfortunate persons, having been taken captive, had remained in bondage sufficiently long to become the parents of a new race ; and that some one pitying the offspring had used his power to set them free, while he left their poor, unpitied parents still to suffer all the sorrows of captivity.*

Having proved the error of the Jews in trusting to the sacrifices which they offered to God, without repentance or holiness, he says, "That oblation of the church which the Lord instructed it to offer up in all the world, is accounted a pure sacrifice with God, and is accepted by him, not because he requires a sacrifice, but because that he who offers it is himself glorified in that which he offers, if his gift be acceptable. Oblations," he continues, "were offered in the one instance, and they are offered in the other. There were sacrifices among the people : there are sacrifices in the church ; but the species is changed, for in the one case they were offered by servants, in the other they are offered by children. It is one and the same Lord. But the oblation has a character proper to servants or children, so that liberty may be indicated by the nature of the offering. For with God nothing is unmeaning, nothing is without its sign or argument. Hence tithes were consecrated to him ; but they who have received liberty, regard everything which they possess as devoted to divine ends, to the use of the Lord, and they freely and gladly give both that which is little, and that which is great, as having a hope of greater things."

And to show the clear and distinct moral view which this primitive teacher of the church took of religious rites, we add the following : " If any one attempts to present

* Cont. Hæres. lib. iii. c. 23.

his offering fairly, becomingly, and legitimately, according only to that which may be seen by the eye, but does not in his heart do that which is right towards his neighbour, or does not fear God, he, though in all outward things his sacrifice is rightly offered, having sin within, deceives not God. Nor can such an oblation profit any one, but ceasing from sin inwardly conceived, lest by an assimilated operation, or rather by the sin itself, it should make the man a homicide to himself. Sacrifices do not sanctify a man, for God does not need a sacrifice ; but the conscience of him who sacrifices being itself pure sanctifies the sacrifice. As the church, therefore, offers with simplicity, its worship is justly regarded by God as a pure sacrifice. Thus St. Paul says to the Philippians, 'I am full, having received of Epaphrōditus the things, which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.*' For it behoves us to offer an oblation to God, and to be found grateful in all things to the Creator, presenting, with purity of doctrine, in faith without hypocrisy, in firm hope, and in fervent love, the first-fruits of the creatures which are his. And this oblation the church alone offers pure to the Creator, presenting it to him from the works of his own hand, with thanksgiving. The Jews do not offer it, for their hands are full of blood ; and they have not received the *Word* which is offered to God. Neither do the synagogues of heretics. For they speak some of one, and some of another Creator, besides the Father ; offering those things which according to us were created, as if he desired or sought after that which is not his own. . . . But how can they believe that that bread upon which we give thanks is the body of their Lord, and

* Philip iv. 18.

that the cup is of his blood, if they do acknowledge that he is the very Son of the Maker of the world, that is, his *Word*, through which the trees become fruitful, and the fountains flow, and the earth brings forth first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear? Our doctrine is consonant to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms our doctrine. We offer to God those things which are his, harmoniously declaring the fellowship and the oneness of the flesh and of the spirit. For as the bread which is earthly receiving the invocation of God is no longer common bread, but *Eucharist*, consisting of two things, earthly and heavenly, so also our bodies, when they have received the Eucharist, having the hope of an eternal resurrection, are no longer corruptible."

"We present our offerings, therefore, to him not as if he needed them, but because for our own sakes he desires us so to do, lest we should become unfruitful. Thus the *Word* himself commanded the people to bring oblations, that they might learn to serve God; and in the same way he desires us to offer our gift upon the altar even continually and for ever. Therefore is the altar in heaven, for thither are our prayers and oblations directed; and there is the temple, as St. John in the Revelation* says, 'And the temple of God was opened in heaven' and the tabernacle: 'Behold the tabernacle is with men, and he will dwell with them.'"+

Irenæus refers again, in his fifth book, to this theme, which acquired, it is probable, a growing importance, as the errors of speculative reasoners, and the power of the world, threatened from day to day the safety of the church. The sacrament of communion had, at the very

* Rev. xi. 19. xxi. 3.

† Lib. iv. c. 18.

beginning of Christian societies, formed the most sacred of all visible helps to the maintenance* of that charity which was to keep them in existence. It entered, as we have seen, into all their systems of worship; and constituted, it would appear, in most instances, the principal portion of divine service. That so important a rite should have been regarded with no other than a mute, uninquiring reverence; that the believer should have partaken of it without considering, or endeavouring to learn, the precise meaning, or intention of the mystery, is barely conceivable. From the very first, it is probable, the thoughts which occupied the mind of Irenæus had place in that of the humblest Christian worshipper. The reverence entertained for the sacrament; the comfort and delight experienced in its celebration, were the cause which led to its continual repetition; and had, it may be believed, their own origin in the solemn feeling that they who received it with faith and charity, became thereby one with their Lord, and their Lord one with them. From the first account given of this sacrament by St. Paul,* to that which we read in the pages of Irenæus, whatever is recorded of the sentiments of Christians respecting it, tends to prove, that it was not as a mere commemorative ceremony believers performed the rite, but that they engaged in it as expecting to derive through its channels rich streams and gifts of grace. The language in which they expressed this hope varied with the feelings of the age, and perhaps of the individual. But if some employed terms and invented images which did of themselves pervert or lead others to pervert, the pure doctrine of the sacrament, and make that appear carnal, which is

* 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24.

wholly spiritual, the tendency to this error, and not to the contrary one, which would render it a mere form, or ceremony, clearly indicates the original character of the rite, the direction of the force with which it at first acted on the minds of believers.

Irenæus regarded the communion as intimately connected with the mystery of redemption, and all the consequent expectations of the Christian. "Altogether vain," he says, "are they who despise any portion of the entire dispensation of God, and deny the salvation of the flesh, and disregard its regeneration, saying that it is not capable of incorruptibility. But if the flesh be not saved, neither has the Lord redeemed us with his blood; neither is the cup of the Eucharist the communication of his body. . . . When therefore the mixed cup and the made bread * receive the Word of God, and become the Eucharist body of Christ, from which the substance of our flesh increases and is strengthened, how do men deny that the flesh is capable of the gift of God, which is eternal life, seeing that it is nourished by the blood and the body of Christ, and is one of his members? Even as St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Ephesians, 'We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.'† Not saying these things concerning some spiritual and invisible man, 'for a spirit hath not flesh and bones,'‡ but of that disposition which is according to the true man, which consists of flesh, and nerves, and bones, nourished by the cup which is the blood of Christ, and increased by the bread which is his body. And as the wood of the vine placed in the earth becomes fruitful in its season, and as the grain of

* Some copies of Irenæus have *the broken* bread instead of the word here used.—Note d.

† Ephes. v. 34.

‡ Luke xxiv. 39.

wheat, falling into the earth and corrupting, rises multiplied, through the Spirit of God which containeth all things, and by his wisdom increases them for the use of man, and receiving his Word becomes the Eucharist, which is the body and blood of Christ ; so also our bodies nourished thereby, and placed in the earth, and decaying therein, will arise in due time, the Word of God giving them a resurrection, to the glory of the Father, who bestows on this which is mortal immortality, and freely endows the corruptible with incorruption, for the strength of God is made perfect in weakness. And this we are to consider, lest we should allow ourselves to be inflated with pride, and to resist God, indulging an ungrateful mind, as if our life originated with ourselves, whereas we have clear proof that it is from his power, and not from our nature, that we have an enduring existence.”*

These passages will serve to illustrate the general character of thought and sentiment proper to this eminent Christian writer. It is well worthy of observation, that a great distinction prevails between that which he affirms positively as the doctrine of the church, as stated plainly in scripture, and supported by indisputable tradition, and that which he advances only on the strength of his own powers of reflection, or according to the views which he individually took of what seemed to be intimated, not directly declared, in the divine word. In respect to the former, he speaks authoritatively, as setting forth, not the opinion of this or that believer, but the simple, solemn truth committed by Christ to his apostles, and by the apostles to those who succeeded them, with the additional and most especial protection against human fraud or infir-

mity, the written word, brought into existence at that very point of time when the mere succession of an apostolic ministry began to be insufficient for the preservation of the truth. In respect to the other class of truths or notions which presented themselves as such to the pious mind of Irenæus, earnest as is the spirit with which they are advanced, and strong as may be the presumption in their favour as the opinions of such a man, they have an aspect very different to that which the actual doctrines of the church present. In the case of the pure apostolic creed all is simple, clear, and authoritative ; in that of the father's speculative inferences, it is evident that the mind may and must be left in doubt, if it cannot follow or admit his arguments. With the articles of the church's creed it is altogether otherwise—the few particulars of which it consists are so stated as to oppose speculation, instead of inviting it. Hence private opinion, though that of the holiest and most enlightened of men, could not be set up in opposition to the common voice of Christ's people. And this supremacy of the creed, as handed down from generation to generation, was a real protection to the purity and holiness of the church ; and as soon as the principle on which it rested was lost sight of, the flood of mere opinion flowed in—the barriers of primitive truth, if not broken down, were covered by the rampant waves of speculation ; great names, the authority of high place and dignity, were substituted for the right of the church itself ; and the real nature of tradition being lost sight of, the true and proper value of the succession of the ministry being perverted, first the submission, and then the prostration, of the minds of believers was demanded to doctrines which might be, as it happened, explanatory of the creed, supplementary or contradictory to its doctrines.

Irenæus continued his labours for the good of his people and the church throughout the tranquil period which followed the persecution above described. About the year 195 he undertook to address Victor, bishop of Rome, on the subject of the Easter controversy. The Asiatic churches, following the practice of Polycarp and other ancient bishops, had persevered in keeping the festival according to the primitive rule observed among them. Victor, assuming the authority of a dictator, commanded these churches to conform themselves to the example of that of Rome. The order was not obeyed, but rejected as unlawful and tyrannous. Victor, urged on by his own imperious temper, immediately proceeded to excommunicate the churches which had ventured to resist his authority ; and the church Catholic, or Universal—the congregation of believers—the actual body of Christ—suffered a wound which, had the power which inflicted it been sufficient, might at once have proved fatal to its unity.

Irenæus, in his letter to Victor,* observes, that the controversy respecting Easter was not confined to questions concerning the day, but extended to other points. Thus some, he says, kept the preceding fast for only a single day : others kept a two-days' fast ; others a longer ; and some even one of forty days. Some difference prevailed, moreover, on the question, whether the nights were to be reckoned as well as the days ; and these doubts, and the varieties of practice to which they gave rise, had not their commencement, he tells us, in his age, but began long before—even in that of the fathers, who not accurately observing, as it seemed, the original custom, permitted the practices, commenced by accident, or from carelessness, to become established. " And yet," adds the venerable man,

* Frag. Deperdit. Op. p. 340.

neither did they, nor do we, continue less to cultivate peace with each other."

Still more important are the words which follow; for they afford additional proof of the comparative indifference with which things not essential to purity of doctrine were regarded, while union in faith was considered as the very foundation of holiness and charity. "The difference in fasting," says Irenæus, "commends the agreement in faith." Some portion of the letter following this sentence is lost; but he continues to remark, that those presbyters who governed the Roman church before Sotez—that is, Anicetus, and Pius, and Hyginus, Telesphorus and Sixtus—did not observe Easter like the Asiatics, nor would permit those around them to do so; and yet, not observing it like them, they were no less at peace with those who came from the provinces of the church in which Easter was thus kept. "And the contrast between the two parties was indeed the more remarkable when they were together, yet were none rejected on this account." "Those presbyters, indeed, who were before you, not holding the custom of those from the East, did, notwithstanding, send the Eucharist to them." He then refers to the instance of Polycarp and Anicetus; and concludes by remarking that, differing as they altogether did in this matter, they nevertheless cherished peace, and kept unbroken the communion of the whole church.

The labours of this great and good man were ended by martyrdom, which he endured in the persecution instituted under the emperor Severus.

CHAPTER V.

PERSECUTIONS INSTITUTED BY SEVERUS—LEONIDES—MARTYR-
DOM OF PERPETUA AND FELICITAS—ORIGEN AND TERTULLIAN
—CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, AND OTHER ANCIENT WRITERS.

A. D.
202. It is remarkable that the Christians had generally to suffer some grievous persecution whenever their rulers either endured unexpected defeat, or obtained some signal victory. Such was the case when Severus triumphed in the East. Gratitude to the gods inspired him with new hatred to both Jews and Christians. Had he suffered disgrace and lost his army, he would have attributed the calamity to the malice of these despised people, and rejoiced in his power to make them feel the vengeance which he had failed to inflict upon the enemy.

Having exercised many barbarities on the Jews in Palestine, he passed into Egypt, where he found a large and flourishing community of Christians. The city of Alexandria had long been celebrated as the resort of men distinguished for their learning and genius. Among these were many who openly confessed their faith in the gospel, and devoted both their talents and their influence to the cause of Christ. In the course of a few years, Alexandria could boast its schools of theology, in which men of the most accomplished minds studied and taught, and constrained others to acknowledge that the noblest powers of intellect may be amply employed in opening the roll of divine mysteries.

Leonides, the father of the great Origen, so illustrious for his genius and piety, was of the episcopal order, and resident at Alexandria when the persecution commenced. His station as well as his Christian zeal pointed him out to the ministers of government, and he was seized and thrown into prison among other men of like character and rank. Origen, at this time, was between sixteen and seventeen years of age, and had already given proof of the extraordinary abilities with which he was endowed. His advancement in holiness was no less remarkable than the extent of his knowledge ; and when his father was apprehended, it was with difficulty that his mother could prevent him from rushing before the magistrates, and seeking at once the honour of suffering for the sake of Christ. Hindered by the watchfulness of his parent from precipitating himself into danger, his next thoughts were to encourage and strengthen his beloved father in the trial of his faith. For this purpose he wrote to him in prison, employing all those arguments which his own high sense of Christian duty had impressed so forcibly upon his mind.

Leonides had six children besides Origen.* They were instructed like him in every species of human as well as sacred learning. But Origen from his earliest youth had displayed singular fervour in the study of scripture. He sought perpetually to discover a spiritual sense in the events recorded, and even in the minutest points of the ancient ritual. The questions which he anxiously put to his father were often difficult and perplexing, and he was occasionally reproved for his curiosity and inquisitiveness. But Leonides secretly cherished a fond admiration of his son's abilities, and now that he was in danger of being oppressed with the melancholy dread

* Huetii : Oregian, lib. i. Op. Origen. T. iv. p. 81.

of leaving his family destitute, and without a protector, in the midst of a cruel world, he found that the graces of Origen's soul were no less mature than the powers of his mind. His most cherished hope was thus fulfilled. It is said that frequently, when he had deemed it necessary to check the youthful ardour of his beloved child, and to warn him against the dangers of a speculative disposition, he would afterwards watch by him at night, and when he saw him asleep, kiss his breast, whispering that he believed the Holy Spirit had a home there, and pouring out thanks to God for having blest him with such an offspring. In happy concord with these sentiments were the feelings with which he read in prison the animating exhortation, "Take care, my father ! let no thought of us change your resolution." His heart was comforted by the heroism thus displayed ; by the conviction which it inspired that the divine blessing would not be wanting to his family ; and Leonides went to the stake full of faith and joy.

While Alexandria was thus suffering under the scourge of persecution, the church at Carthage was already deprived of the holiest of its members. The attack on the Christians of that city had been commenced two years before that on the faithful in Egypt. Many noble examples of constancy were exhibited by the Carthaginian believers. Among the most eminent, history has ever delighted to number that of Vivia Perpetua, and five other martyrs, two of whom, Revocatus and Felicitas, were slaves, and Saturninus and Secundulus, to whom another believer named Satur joined himself out of pure love to his brethren.

Vivia Perpetua was a young and noble lady, married, and the mother of a child which she still nursed. The only other member of her family who believed in the

gospel was one of her brothers. Neither she nor any of her companions had as yet been baptized, but they were catechumens, and had evidently become deeply imbued with the most fervent spirit of devotion. It is from an account, drawn up during her imprisonment by Perpetua herself, that we learn the particulars of her sufferings. The agony which her father endured when he saw her before the tribunal, and the violence of his indignation when he in vain besought her to recant, are spoken of with touching simplicity.

During the few days which intervened between the first examination and the committal of the accused to prison, they were baptized, and Perpetua tells us that her prayer in coming out of the water was, that patience might be granted her in bodily suffering. Soon after this, she continues, "They put us in prison. I was terrified, for I had never beheld such darkness. What a day it was ! What heat I endured through the pressure of the crowd and the soldiers ! I was nearly overwhelmed with anxiety for my infant. At length the blessed deacons Tertius and Pomponius came to our aid, and by means of money obtained permission for us to refresh ourselves, and to go into a more open part of the prison. My companions had only themselves to think of ; but I took my child, nearly dying with hunger, and gave him the breast. I besought my mother respecting him ; and I endeavoured to inspire my brother with courage and resolution. The grief which I caused my family greatly disquieted me, and I passed many days in sorrow. After some time, having my infant in the prison with me, I found myself strengthened, and the prison became to me like a palace, so that I felt it happier to be there than anywhere in the world. My brother seeing this, said, ' Sister ! I know you have great

faith in God. Beseech him to instruct you as to whether this calamity will end in martyrdom or not.”

It requires but little reflection to discover, that the circumstances in which believers were placed at this time were, of all others, most likely to stimulate a feeling of confidence in the present succour of the Almighty. Nor, with the gospel for our help, is it more difficult to understand, how it might become a proper and legitimate exercise of faith to call upon God, in the name of the blessed Jesus, for some especial manifestation of his readiness to communicate his will, and to render help by his immediate presence, in the terrible season of persecution.

Without some consideration of this kind, the language employed by Perpetua, and other confessors of the gospel in early times, can scarcely be rightly understood. If the reader of church history cannot place himself in a position to estimate the power of circumstances, he is incapable of forming any correct idea of the value of ecclesiastical records, even as ministering to our knowledge of human nature, and the general progress of events. If, on the other hand, as a Christian he neglects to weigh the force of Divine promises, to meditate on the nature of heavenly grace, the power of the Spirit, the designs of Providence, and the will of God,—by its own simple energy so sufficient to endow the humblest agents with a species of omnipotence,—he lowers the standard of his faith, denies to the gospel the glory of its character as the “power of God and the wisdom of God,”* and adds to the difficulty of accounting for its original diffusion, and the change which it produced on minds and characters in which sorrow or imperfection confessed that it needed the help of Heaven.

Perpetua tells us that, having listened to the entreaties

* Rom. i. 16; 1 Cor. i. 24.

of her brother, she answered him, that the next day he should have some intelligence. "I prayed," she continues, and behold what was shown me! I saw a golden ladder of great height, reaching from earth to heaven, but so narrow that it was not possible for more than one person to mount it at the same time. On each side were suspended all kinds of instruments, swords, lances, hooks, and knives, so that he who ascended incautiously must have been grievously torn and wounded. At the foot of the ladder lay an enormous dragon, watching for, and threatening those who desired to ascend. The first who made the attempt was Satur, who was not with us when we were arrested, but voluntarily gave himself up on our account. When he had reached the top he turned to me and said, 'Perpetua, I await you, but beware of the dragon!' I answered, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, he shall do me no harm.' At these words the dragon gently raised himself as if fearing me, and mounting the first scale I trod upon his head."

Pepetua proceeds to relate, that having thus begun to ascend the ladder, she beheld a garden of vast extent, in the midst of which sat a man of gigantic stature, clad as a shepherd, and with snow-white locks. He was employed among his sheep, and many thousands of persons, clad in white, surrounded him. "He raised his head," she says, "looked at me, and exclaimed, 'Thou art well come, my daughter,' and he gave me some of the milk of the flock. I received it thankfully, and partook of it, while all those who surrounded him murmured, Amen! At the sound of their voices I awoke, still, as it were, eating something sweet!" Perpetua tells us that she lost no time in describing this vision to her brother, who agreed with her in believing that it predicted their approaching martyr-

dom, and that the curdled milk which had been given her was an emblem of the Eucharist.

In the course of a few days information arrived that the accused were to undergo a second examination. The father of Perpetua hastened to the prison. He appealed to her by the obedience which she owed to his parental authority ; by the numberless instances of his affection ; by the sorrows of her mother, and her own love for the innocent child at her breast. But she remained firm to her original resolution ; and the old man left the prison with a broken heart.

The next day, amid the shouts of the crowd, Perpetua and her companions were again conveyed to the tribunal. It took little time to prove the guilt of the confessors, according to the heathen's notion of guilt. Perpetua was the last called up. But a worse trial than that of the examination awaited her. At the moment when she appeared, her father rushed forward, with her infant in his arms, and clasping her neck endeavoured to drag her from the tribunal. For a moment the judge seemed melted to pity ; and he exclaimed, "Pay some regard to your father's old age : have mercy on the helplessness of your infant. Sacrifice for the prosperity of the emperor." A prompt refusal followed this command, and the judge enraged at the rejection of his implied offer of mercy, ordered one of the soldiers to drive out Perpetua's father, who still stood weeping and clinging about his daughter. The order was readily obeyed, and a heavy blow almost levelled the old man with the earth. "I felt the blow," says Perpetua, "as if I had been myself struck, so greatly was I afflicted at beholding my father thus treated in his old age."

Sentence of exposure to the wild beasts having been

pronounced, the confessors were re-committed to prison. Perpetua immediately sent the deacon Pomponius for her child ; but her father refused to let her have him any more. Perpetua heard of his resolve with a prayer to heaven for mercy on herself and on her offspring. She had other visions from which she derived the consolation necessary to her support. Her father again visited her in prison, but only to renew their mutual anguish.

As the time of their exposure in the amphitheatre approached, the officers treated their prisoners with somewhat more of kindness than before. On the day preceding that of the public games, they were permitted to partake of a meal together with their brethren and friends. This, it is said, was converted into an *agape* or love-feast ; and they took occasion, during the repast, to speak to those who were present of the judgments of God upon his enemies, and of the happiness of suffering for the sake of his glory. One of them observing the curiosity of the crowd, said, "Look well at us now, that you may know us again at the day of judgment."

The morning of the spectacle being arrived, the confessors were led forth from their prison, and conducted to the gate of the city, at which it was customary for those who had to perform any part in the public games to be invested with particular robes proper to the ceremony. But Perpetua and her companions firmly refused to put on these emblems of idolatry. "We come hither," they said, "to preserve our liberty. We sacrifice our life for our religion. This is our agreement with you!" The tribune saw and acknowledged the reasonableness of these words, and the martyrs were allowed to pass on as they were. Their sufferings in the amphitheatre were long and terrible, but borne with a heroism which seemed to

set at defiance both the savage nature of the wild animals, and the worse barbarity of man.

Three of the most celebrated fathers of the ancient church were witnesses of the persecution carried on in Alexandria and Carthage. In the former, Origen and his master, Clemens Alexandrinus ; and in the latter, Tertullian.

Clemens is spoken of by some authors as a native of Athens ; by others as born in Alexandria. All agree, however, in representing him as early devoted to study, and as travelling through various countries inspired only by an insatiable desire of knowledge. At length divine providence brought him acquainted with some eminent Christian of Ionia. By him he was instructed in the rudiments of the faith ; and the information thus acquired appeared to him of sufficient interest and importance to induce him to prosecute his inquiries further. He travelled, it seems, through Greece, Italy, Asia Minor, and Palestine, in pursuit of that wisdom which he had so long felt to be necessary to his happiness. It is evident, indeed, from the notices handed down to us, that he spared no pains to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. He met with the last and best of his teachers in Egypt, and it is generally believed that this was the celebrated Pantæus, a Sicilian by birth, but the most distinguished of the masters who presided over the great Christian school of Alexandria. He had studied and embraced the philosophy of the Stoics ; and when he became a believer in the gospel, still continued to investigate with laborious care the various opinions, whether human or divine, which a long tradition had accumulated and massed together.

The learning and peculiar ability of Pantæus* appear

* Jerome, Catal. Script. Eccles.

to have laid the foundation of that celebrity long enjoyed by the theological school of Alexandria. He was devout, humble, and eloquent. The sweetness of his voice and language, and the richness of his discourse, obtained for him the title of the Sicilian bee. St. Clement was well fitted to appreciate the value of such a master, and he found in his instructions an answer to the various questionings which had long disturbed his mind. Pantænus was placed at the head of the Alexandrian school, some time before the year 179, and he continued to instruct the Christians who lived in the city, or frequented it for the purposes of commerce or inquiry, till after the commencement of the third century. But it was long before this that he resigned his office as head of the catechetical school, which the theological seminary at Alexandria properly was. In the year 189 he was sent on a mission to India, and it is said that he found among the people of that country the Gospel of St. Matthew in the Hebrew language.*

On the departure of Pantænus for India, St. Clement succeeded to the office of superintendent of the catechumens. The works which he has left afford ample proof of his acquaintance with the abstrusest philosophy and learning of his age. But it is said that his skill in communicating his knowledge was no less remarkable than his erudition. Some kinds of science to an inexperienced mind, he used to say, was like a knife in the hand of a child who had not been taught how to handle it. Nor was any information of much value, he contended, which could not be applied to the improvement of life and manners. Thus, he always, it is said, carefully considered the dispositions, the strength or weakness of those whom

* Eusebius, lib. vi. c. 13.

he had to teach, that he might know beforehand whether he was about to sow the seeds of truth on the way-side, on the rock or among thorns, or on good ground.*

The name of Clement was too celebrated to allow of his remaining safe at Alexandria, on the breaking out of the persecution. He therefore left the city, and justified himself in thus saving his life from the fury of the enemy, by an appeal to the words of the Saviour.† It is commonly supposed that he took up his abode with his former pupil, Saint Alexander, then in Cappadocia, but afterwards bishop of Jerusalem.

It was under this distinguished teacher that Leonides placed his favourite and accomplished son. The extensive learning, and even the peculiarities of Clement, were well adapted to bring out the genius of Origen, and fascinate his mind with the wonderful prospects presented to it in the wide regions of Divine truth. But he had scarcely reached his seventeenth year when the persecution deprived him at the same time of both his instructor and his father. The flight of the one, and the martyrdom of the other, left him to all appearance desolate. But a Christian lady, admiring his piety, received him into her house, and would have continued to foster him as her son. It was not long, however, that Origen remained under her roof. She had afforded the same hospitality to a heretic teacher, Paul of Antioch; and the scholar of St. Clement listened with mingled horror and disgust to the dangerous notions which he endeavoured to establish.

Trembling lest the persuasions and eloquence of Paul, the sense of his own poverty and destitution, or the motherly kindness of his protectress, might influence his mind, Origen adopted the stern resolution to hold no

* S. Clementis Vita. Baillet.

† Mat. x. 23.

communion, not even in prayer, with the heretical teacher. The rule of the church was his guide ; its doctrine was his support ; and when he found that the difficulty of preserving his faith pure and unsuspected increased, he retired from the hospitable mansion which had been opened to him, and bravely encountered whatever his poverty and friendlessness might inflict.

The only means of support which presented themselves were such as could be procured by the teaching of grammar. To this occupation, therefore, he resigned himself. But he had not been long so employed, when his character for ability, and his known holiness of disposition, pointed him out to the bishop of Alexandria as well qualified to superintend the catechetical school. Origen was now not more than eighteen years of age ; but while, on the one hand, his singular accomplishments did in reality qualify him for the situation, so, on the other, the loss which the church had lately sustained, rendered it difficult to find among the elder Christians a proper instructor for the catechumens. The situation, however, though one of eminent usefulness, produced but little emolument ; and when Origen, with noble self-denial, resolved to give up the teaching which had before supported him, he found it necessary to sell his books, the only property he possessed. The person who bought them engaged to pay him some small sum daily ;* and on this Origen contrived to exist for several years. Never had an instructor exceeded him in zeal or faithfulness. He watched every movement of his thoughts with unceasing jealousy ; and no less anxious to prevent the suspicions of others, than to preserve the peace of his

* That is, four oboli, little more than sixpence of our money. Eusebius, lib. vi. c. 3.

own conscience, he put literally into practice the most figurative of our Lord's expressions.

From the number of inquirers and catechumens frequenting the school, the daily labours of Origen were heavy and unceasing. He performed them with a cheerful spirit ; frequently fasting, and constantly praying, in order that both his body and mind might be kept in ready subjection to the call of duty. Nor did he content himself with having performed the work of the day. As soon as he was left alone at night, he hastened to the study of the divine volume, and the dawn often found him still engaged in holy meditation. The few hours which he allowed for sleep, were passed not on a couch, but on the ground. His ordinary mode of living, in other respects, was of the same severe character. He possessed but one tunic, he wore no sandals, and when his friends besought him to partake of their repasts, or to receive payment for the knowledge with which he had enriched and comforted them, he refused to accept aught at their hands, lest he should seem to covet more than he had, or to do that for reward which he only desired to perform for the glory of God.

Many disbelievers were brought to receive the gospel by the teaching of Origen, and the influence which his character exercised on their feelings. Others who had been instructed in the rudiments of the faith rejoiced in the new light which his discourses shed on the words of scripture ; while they who had arrived at the higher stages of experience found in his elevated sentiments, in his pure and devout love of Christ, a fresh argument for persevering in the ways of holiness.

Some striking instances occurred of the maturity of faith to which many of the learners in his catechetical

school arrived. Seven of them suffered martyrdom ; and he was not wanting in any of those exercises of brotherly love towards them which their sufferings required. He visited them in prison ; stood by them when undergoing examination before the judge ; attended them to the stake, and gave them the kiss of peace while the infuriated multitude threatened him every instant with destruction. The providence of God alone preserved his life amid the dangers to which it was exposed. It was not, however, without suffering frequent injury that he so heroically performed his duty. On several occasions he was dragged through the city, and on others put to the torture. But his courage was unsubdued. Some of the people meeting him one day in the streets compelled him to go with them to the temple of Serapis. Having trimmed his hair, so as to give him the appearance of a priest of the temple, they forced him up the steps of the building, and placed palm-branches in his hand, commanding him to give them to the worshippers of the gods. He immediately held them up, and exclaimed with a loud voice, " Yes ! indeed, come ! receive these palms, but in honour of Jesus Christ, not of your idol."

Origen had given up the teaching of secular literature on being appointed to the catechetical school ; but the celebrity which it acquired under his management opened to him a wider sphere of usefulness than he had originally contemplated. He saw among those who came to be instructed in the rudiments of the gospel, many men of acute and powerful understanding. Occasionally the disciples of some famous heretic would enter his school, and he thus found, that to render it useful to every class of inquirers, he must discourse on the whole circle of human learning. The ability with which he performed his new task was

soon proved by the effects produced.* Not only did the most wealthy and powerful people of the city come to hear him, but the most distinguished philosophers. They readily acknowledged the extent of his erudition, and often went away permanently impressed with the truth of what he taught. A rich follower of Valentinus, named Ambrose, was thus converted, and willingly confessed his deliverance from the most fatal of errors to the blessing which attended Origen's discourses.

Soon after this his labours at Alexandria were, for a time, interrupted. A messenger was sent to the prefect, and to Demetrius, the bishop, from the governor of Arabia, requesting that Origen might be allowed to visit him and instruct him in the nature of his doctrine. The desire was granted, and the teacher of the catechetical school took up his residence for some time at the court of the Arabian prince.† A slight mention is made of his having, previously to this, made a journey to Rome,‡ which he did with the desire, he said, of beholding that most ancient church; but he remained in neither place longer than was necessary to accomplish the object in view. The school at Alexandria still occupied his most affectionate thoughts, and he appears to have continued in the performance of his duties, till the commencement of a dreadful war, in the year 215, compelled him to leave the city.

Seeking in vain for a safe retreat in Egypt, he journeyed into Palestine, and obtained a hospitable home at Cæsarea, with the bishop of that place. His great fame and

* Jerome Catalog. Script. Eccl. Origen.

† Eusebius, lib. vi. c. xix.

‡ Eusebius, lib. vi. c. xiv. Origen is here spoken of under the name of Adamantius.

virtues recommended him to the people, as well as to the clergy, and it is recorded as an interesting circumstance in the history of the church, as well as illustrative of Origen's reputation, that he was invited by the bishop himself to expound the Scriptures publicly in the church, though he had not been ordained a presbyter.*

This occurrence excited no slight degree of attention. Demetrius, Origen's own bishop, heard of it with great displeasure. Origen had, indeed, been long a teacher, and had expounded Scripture to numerous hearers of every class and degree of enlightenment. But it is evident, from the mode in which the circumstance alluded to is spoken of, that there was a vast difference, even in these early times, between teaching in the school and in the church, in the consecrated or unconsecrated place. The nearest approach, it seems, which the unordained catechist could commonly make to preaching, was the delivering of lectures to the catechumens, in a building called the Baptistry.† But both the bishop of Cæsarea, and the bishop of Jerusalem defended the liberty which had been given to Origen; and in answer to the statement of Demetrius, that no layman had ever before preached in the presence of bishops, they affirmed that he erred from the truth in making such an assertion. "It is not as you have stated," they remarked, "for if any be found who seem likely to profit the brethren, they are exhorted even by the holy bishops themselves to address the people. Thus Evelpis, in Laramandæ, was exhorted by Neon; Paulinus, in Iconium, by Celsus; Theodorus, in Synnada, by Atticus, our most blessed brothers; and it is possible that the same thing has occurred in other places, though unknown to us."‡

* Eusebius, lib. vi. c. xix.

† Valesius, Ap. Euseb. n.

* Eusebius, lib. vi. c. xix.

Such was the answer sent by the two bishops of Palestine to their brother of Alexandria. But Demetrius seems to have considered the fidelity of Origen in danger, for he shortly after dispatched some of his deacons to Cæsarea, charged with an especial mission, and directing him to return immediately to Alexandria. It is not very clear whether this order was issued in virtue of Origen's connexion with the catechetical school, or as an act of the bishop, claiming jurisdiction over him as simply one of his flock. But the command, in whichever sense viewed, was obeyed. Origen returned to Alexandria, and resumed the labours which had been interrupted by the war.

Every year contributed somewhat to the reputation of this great man; and his conversation was equally sought by the noblest ^{and the} ~~and the~~ humblest. On one occasion he received a command to attend the mother of the emperor, Alexander Severus, and she spent a considerable time in listening to the expositions which he delivered of the Old and New Testament. His ability in these exercises was now so generally acknowledged, that one of his earliest scholars, the wealthy Ambrose, urged him incessantly to give them a more permanent character than that which they could receive as mere extempore discourses.

Such a wish as this could not, in those times, be fulfilled without considerable labour and expense. The toilsome process of multiplying copies, even to a small extent, could only be carried on by wealthy authors or wealthy patrons. Ambrose had the piety and good sense to feel, that his riches could not be better employed than in securing, not only to his cotemporaries, but to posterity, so noble a possession as the works of Origen. Never did wealth rear a more splendid monument in pure devotion

to genius and religion. Seven, or more, short-hand writers, we are told, were engaged by Ambrose to pen the discourses of Origen as he delivered them. These reporters relieved each other at due intervals. There was the same number of transcribers employed to copy that which had been thus rapidly taken down by the short-hand writers; and, in addition to these, there was a party of young females, skilled in elegant penmanship, whose duty it was to present a still more perfect copy of the original writing.

Some time after this, Origen travelled again through Palestine and Greece.* During his sojourn in the former country, the bishop of Cæsarea, and the bishop of Jerusalem, agreed to admit him to the rank of presbyter.† It is a matter of doubt whether he had ever been ordained deacon. The more probable opinion is, that he was raised at once, or *per saltum*, as it is termed, to the second order in the ministry.‡

Demetrius no sooner heard of the consecration of his celebrated catechist, than he expressed the most violent indignation at the conduct of the Syrian bishops. He was even still more enraged with Origen himself, and immediately commenced a series of proceedings, the influence of which was felt long after the time of Demetrius or his associates. Synods were held in which sentence was passed against Origen, deposing him from the grade to which he had been raised. These assemblies were almost entirely under the influence of the bishop of Alexandria;

* It is very difficult to determine either the dates or order of Origen's travels. The learned Huetius confesses that he could only arrange them on conjecture. Oregian, lib. i. c. ii. sec. xi.

† He was then forty-three years old.

‡ Huetius, Oregian. lib. i. c. ii. sec. xii.

and their example was followed by others, so that, it is said, every portion of the church agreed in the condemnation of Origen, with the exception of the dioceses of Palestine, Arabia, Phœnicia, and Achaia.

The bishops who had ordained him, paying no heed to the decrees of the synods which they believed to be partial and unjust, continually urged him to exercise his ministry in their churches. During a visit to Jerusalem, the college of presbyters in that city, almost compelled him to preach, so little did they suppose him guilty of anything deserving the censure of the church. At Cæsarea, he became acquainted with the two brothers, Gregory, afterwards called Thaumaturgus, and Athenodorus, young men of noble family, and whose subsequent influence in the church was the fruit of that long and patient culture which they received from Origen. Even this would have been some compensation for his banishment from Alexandria. But he employed the leisure which he now enjoyed, in the composition of his Commentaries on Isaiah and Ezekiel, and other works of like importance ; he made several journeys into the adjoining provinces, and into Greece ; attended synods, converted heretics, and proved himself in all things ready to spend and be spent in the service of the Lord.

In the persecution under Decius, Origen was still at Cæsarea, and bore his full share of the sufferings inflicted on the Christians of that place. He was cast into prison, tortured, laden with irons, and threatened, from day to day, with being burnt alive. But his tormentors seemed to rejoice in his lingering agonies ; and he was still alive when, either from the accession of a new emperor, or some other cause, the persecution ceased. He left the prison and went to Tyr ; but his frame, attenuated by

labours, fastings, and suffering, never recovered its vigour ; and after two years of sickness and decline, this pious and wonderful man sunk into the grave.

We shall give some account, in a future chapter, of the peculiar views entertained by Origen, and which have, in every age of the church, been considered as interfering with the value of his writings. As far as the brief records of his life will allow us to judge, he afforded, in his personal character, a noble specimen of Christian zeal and devotion. Eccentric as were some of the actions of his youth, and unauthorized as he himself afterwards knew them to be by the real meaning of the gospel, they proved the intensity of his desire to be worthy of his calling as a Christian, and of the blessing of his martyred father. His manhood was passed in perpetual labour ; nor does he seem to have sought preferment or reward of any kind but that which might be looked for from Heaven. He was more than forty years old when ordained presbyter, and the mark of favour which he thus received from one bishop was employed by another to excite against him every species of contumely, and to involve him in trouble and disgrace. But in the midst of danger, when burdened with infirmity, and almost everywhere misrepresented, he steadily pursued his painful course, and then only ceased from labour when his body had been broken on the rack, and he could only in his heart confess to the glory of the Lord.

Less speculative than Origen—less refined and tender in sentiment, but of powerful mind—Tertullian was the other great champion of the truth in its present struggles with the world. He was born at Carthage, about the year 160, his father being at the time an officer of some rank in the proconsular troops. Educated as a heathen, and

surrounded by all the follies and luxuries of a dissipated city, he passed the early years of his life in the constant pursuit of pleasure. The Christians of Carthage were already of sufficient note to excite attention to their doctrines and mode of living. But Tertullian ridiculed the former for their simplicity, and the latter for its opposition to everything which he believed necessary to the enjoyment of existence.

It is not known at what time his mind was set free from this thralldom of sin and darkness. We may conjecture, however, that the serious study of the sciences and of jurisprudence, in which he is said to have become remarkably skilled, prevented his continuing in that state of gross licentiousness which characterized one portion of his life. According to some allusions in his own writings, he was led to regard the Christians with more respect, on discovering that they had the power of driving away evil spirits, and of silencing the oracles of the gods. The impression thus produced was deepened by the spectacle of patience and fortitude which the Christians ever exhibited in the season of persecution. Nor are there wanting indications of the awful fears excited in his mind, when he heard for the first time of the wrath of the Almighty, and of a final judgment.

Tertullian's conversion, whenever it took place, was evidently attended with feelings of a most severe and solemn character. Nor did the impressions first made on his mind, by the discovery of Divine truth, lose any of their intensity in his later years. We may attribute, perhaps, some of the darker shades of his Christian experience—some of the saddest of his errors in opinion—to the overwhelming awe which mingled itself with the repentance and faith of the convert. The number and

greatness of his sins, the exceeding power of the world on his affections, and the natural haughtiness of his temper, rendered his conversion a miracle. He could not but feel the infinite value of the grace which had wrought the change. It was impossible for him to meditate too thankfully or profoundly on the mysterious nature of the mercy to which he owed his translation from the kingdom of darkness into that of God's dear Son.

Inspired by a devotion so deep and fervid, and not unmingled with a melancholy severity, Tertullian became an advocate for the gospel, whose thoughts breathed and words burned with the very life of faith. Heathens and heretics trembled before the spirit which assailed them in his apologies and treatises. He had witnessed the barbarities practised on the Christians at Carthage. His own recollections taught him how blind even men of erudition were to the evidences of Christianity ; and his lot was cast in a period when the rankest productions of heresy seemed ready to choke the growing seed of the gospel. While, therefore, he had ample cause for gratitude in the experience of his own change and deliverance, he had no less reason to feel that the precious gift which he enjoyed could only be preserved to his soul by the most jealous watchfulness. This he unceasingly exercised ; and his piety and labours afforded noble proofs of his close communion with Heaven.

It is stated, in the brief account which an ancient author* has given of his life, that Tertullian was a presbyter. At what period he was admitted to that rank is uncertain. It is equally uncertain whether it was in the church of Carthage or in that of Rome, that he entered

* Jerome, Catalog. Script. Eccles.

the ministry. That he was married we learn from the existence of two treatises which he dedicated to his wife. One other circumstance alone is recorded of this eminent man. It is that which has thrown an unhappy shade over his otherwise illustrious character. The ancient author, before alluded to, says, that he remained a presbyter of the church till middle age, when, affected by the envy and contumelies of the Roman clergy, he glided into the errors of Montanus, and wrote many books on the new prophecy, and some especially against the church.*

What it was which excited the hostility of the Roman clergy against Tertullian does not appear. His personal character seems to have been at all times, since his conversion, in most strict harmony with the gospel. It is wholly improbable, therefore, that any error of conduct on his part was the cause of that dislike to him which ended in his separation from the church. The words in which it is spoken of might lead us to suppose that his talents or his zeal produced the rupture between him and his fellow-labourers. This would suggest a melancholy suspicion respecting the state of the whole body of the Roman clergy. But if such a view of the prevailing character of ecclesiastics, in the most powerful branch of the church, at the end of the second century, be too gloomy and disheartening, it may be supposed that Tertullian had excited some suspicion in the minds of his brethren, by those peculiarities of temper which prepared him both for the rigours and the errors of Montanism.

The heresy known under this name, was first preached

* Those particularized by Jerome are the treatises *De Pudicitia*; *De Persecutione*; *De Jejuniis*; *De Monogamia*; *De Ecstasi*, in six books; and a seventh against Apollonius.

in Ardaba,* a little town of Mysia, on the confines of Phrygia.† Its author, Montanus, had been but lately admitted into the number of the faithful, when, on a sudden, he believed himself to be divinely inspired, and, endowed by heaven with authority to impose new laws on the church, and to change its discipline, so as to make it answer to his notions of spiritual perfection. Of those who first heard him, some hesitated not to ascribe his ecstasies to demoniacal influence, and they endeavoured to convince the multitude that Montanus had none of the signs of a true prophet, or servant of God. But others were filled with awe at the feelings which he excited in their minds. The confidence with which he spoke to them of his revelations; the solemnity with which he denounced the coldness of the church in its devotions; the laxity of its rule; and the increasing wordliness of its clergy, speedily increased the number of his hearers. Ardent minds imagined they could discover in his lofty assertions of a spiritual rule, signs of a new age in the progress of the gospel; of a further development of its heavenly mysteries. The extraordinary influence of the Divine Spirit had been, in the first instance, the support of the apostles, and the only source of their power. No believer in the gospel could deny this, and it was therefore argued in favour of Montanus, that as he might be appointed by God to perform some high and difficult part in furthering his designs, so he might also be the subject of a new manifestation of the Holy Spirit, as dwelling in the soul of

* Eusebius Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. xvi.

† Hence the Montanists, and other sects connected with them, were sometimes called Cataphrygians. The principal seat of this people was at Pepuza, which they were accustomed to call their Jerusalem. Ib. c. xviii.

man, and investing it with its own wonderful powers and graces. It is easy to see that where there is a disposition to be moved by high pretensions, the possibility of their being true in some particular instance, may soon be converted into the belief that they actually are so in the case of a man like Montanus. So also may we understand how that, when the mind has consented to proceed thus far, it will continue to give its assent to propositions much more extravagant than those originally advanced. The difficulties which first opposed themselves to the acknowledgment of Montanus, as a divine messenger, having been overcome, the path was open to a limitless extent ; and it is possible, therefore, that some of the most hideous representations of his heresy are not altogether without truth. Thus according to more than one writer he declared that he was not a mere minister of heaven, aided by extraordinary influences of the Spirit, but that holy being—the *Paraclete*—himself. Some have even asserted that his madness impelled him to proclaim that he was not an angel or ambassador from heaven, but God the Father ! While we shudder at the idea of such blasphemy having been uttered by a supposed convert to the gospel, it is well for us to recollect that there is one circumstance which lessens the improbability of the account being true. Montanus, and those whom he taught, had been from infancy familiar with heathenism, and all its monstrous errors. The belief in one God, in a being whose glory and perfections are alike infinite, was unknown to their minds, or if received, was so dissimilar to all their other convictions and to their common habits of thought, that little was needed to overcome the faint impressions it had made, or even to render it subservient to a returning affection for the old associations of idolatry. He who became an en-

thusiast or fanatic, after having been long a heathen, was plainly in a very different situation to that of the erring man who has been educated in the knowledge of revelation. In the latter case, the mind has so learnt to fear God, that, whatever its prostration to a wild imagination, the nature or perfection of Deity ; the glory or omnipotence which pertains to the everlasting Father, remains as distinct as ever from every other object presented to the thoughts. Nothing can induce a man in the possession of his senses, who has been brought up in a Christian land, to believe himself a god. But the heathen could, without a charge of impiety, think of the deities which he worshipped as once but men like himself ; and, if so, there was no actual impossibility in his own translation to the throne of a god ; there was no law with which he had been made acquainted against his putting off the human nature to be invested with the divine.

A consideration of this kind may help us, in some degree, to understand how it became easy for the ancients to credit the accounts given of Montanus, and the earlier heretics. Whether true or false, the history of these men shocks the reader of later times, and he feels disposed to reject the whole as fabulous, or to regard the grosser parts of it as the invention of pious zeal, willing to employ any species of defence against errors which, viewed even in the mildest light, were so ruinous to the peace and salvation of souls.

It is within the scope of credibility, then, that Montanus believed himself the incarnate Spirit of God, or even that he was the all-glorious Father. But this is a bare possibility. The notion is not supported by the actual testimony of antiquity ; and the mere fact, that such a man as Tertullian embraced the main dogmas of Montanus, is

sufficient to throw a doubt on the more startling accounts given of his heresy.* It cannot be disputed, however, that the system which he endeavoured to establish had its birth in his own wild enthusiasm, and that it was marked by distorted imitations of the gospel, which, taken for the original, could not but drive those who adopted them into errors most opposed to the spirit and discipline of the church. Many authors agree in representing Montanus as pretending to be the Paraclete, or Comforter, spoken of by our Lord to his apostles. But some describe him as claiming to be that divine being in his own person ; while others suppose that he did nothing more than assert his plenary or extraordinary inspiration by the Holy Spirit, which both fitted him, and gave him authority, to execute his designs, to speak his language, and exalt his name. This latter notion is the better supported of the two. It was scarcely possible for Tertullian, whose mind possessed so much vigour and acuteness, to believe that a mere man was the Paraclete in the sense in which we are accustomed to interpret that word. But if he

* Mosheim allows that the mere literal interpretation of some ancient authors might support the worst view taken of Montanus and his heresy, but that such an interpretation would not be the right one. *Parum hi accurate loquuntur : verum recte sentiunt.* " For unless I am deceived, not one of them intended to say, that Montanus considered himself the actual Paraclete, or that the Holy Spirit dwelt within him instead of a soul ; which if he wished to be believed, he must have contradicted himself, and must also have been the most foolish of mankind. But this it was which they meant, namely, that Montanus wished to persuade others, that the Paraclete spoke from him and by him, and that the prophecies which were uttered by him, were not his own, but the sayings and the words of the Paraclete himself."—*De Rebus Christian. ante Constant. Sæcul. II. c. lxvi. n.*

understood that the Paraclete might be vicariously represented by some wonderful minister of heaven, raised up as others had been, though endowed with greater powers, it was possible for him to fall into the error of believing Montanus to be such a minister, and yet not sacrifice his faith or holiness. Montanus, it is said, filled the minds of his hearers with awe as he prophesied of the second advent of Christ ; of the consequent speedy overthrow of the enemies of his people, and of the establishment of his kingdom upon earth. Connected with these solemn subjects, was one of more immediate practical influence. Some tenderness had hitherto been shown towards those unhappy persons who, having denied their Saviour rather than suffer martyrdom, had subsequently manifested a sincere repentance of their weakness. In several instances, the bitter tears which were shed, the long and ardent prayers which had been offered up, and the readiness to suffer as soon as the judge should again be prepared to hear the confession and condemn, sufficed to obtain for the lapsed, as they were called, readmission to the privilege of church communion.

But this indulgence Montanus regarded as utterly inconsistent with the purity of a Christian people.* He argued, on the same principles, against the readmission of any one guilty of notorious crimes into the congregation of believers ; and thus the whole system of the church, as having any consideration for the imperfection of its members, or the frailty and weaknesses of human nature, was threatened with a revolution, which would have rendered it as terrible as the mountain which burned with fire, and might not be touched.

* “ Montanus,” says the Bishop of Lincoln, in his valuable work on Tertullian, “ was evidently a man of weak intellects, who was

Among the earliest followers of Montanus were Maximilla and Priscilla. To both of these women were ascribed the honour of a divine call, and prophetic inspiration. The part which they took in publishing the dogmas of their master, did little to increase his credit among the wise and good. Whether true or false, a charge was brought against them of having deserted their families, and violated the first of social duties, in their devotion to Montanus. Their pretensions to inspiration disgusted many who might have patiently borne with the enthusiasm of the founder of the sect.

But notwithstanding the manifold reasons which most calm and unprejudiced minds discovered for at once rejecting the claims of Montanus and his followers, Tertullian allowed himself to be ensnared by his mysticism. This is not, however, to be attributed altogether to the power which the new system exercised on his imagination. St. Jerome tells us, as we have seen, that he suffered harsh, perhaps unjust, treatment, at the hands of the Roman clergy. A sense of personal injury has often rendered other great men, as well as Tertullian, blind to the

induced, partly by a superstitious temper, partly by the desire of distinction, himself to pursue, and to recommend to others, an ascetic course of life. The austerity of his doctrine and practice naturally gained him admirers and followers; and he confirmed his empire over their minds by professing to see visions, and to receive revelations from heaven. Perhaps he had succeeded in persuading himself that he was divinely inspired. Fanaticism is for the most part combined with fraud, in the character of the religious impostor; nor is it improbable that, in the state of exhaustion to which the body of Montanus was reduced by the length and frequency and severity of his fasts, his mind might occasionally become disordered, and he might mistake for realities the creations of a distempered fancy."—*Ecclesiastical History of Second and Third Centuries*, p. 32.

errors of opinions and systems, which furnished them with a standing-place whence they might annoy their opponents. But an explanation, somewhat more creditable to Tertullian, may be looked for in the state of the church at this particular period.

The gentleness and consideration with which the lapsed were commonly treated, might be regarded as a proper exercise of Christian charity. It was a false zeal which denied the possibility of an efficacious repentance in such cases ; or refused to admit the penitent again to the privileges of communion. But in Tertullian's time the opinion was gaining ground, that exemption from persecution might lawfully be sought by any means, or purchased at any price. It is recorded that about the beginning of the third century, Christians were to be found in courts and camps, and in the most splendid as well as in the most enlightened societies. But it has not been asked with what modifications of doctrine, or by what sacrifice of evangelical strictness and purity, these Christians, in the most exposed situations of the world, contrived to keep themselves safe, while so many of their obscurer brethren were dragged forth to fight the good fight of faith, and suffer the most cruel persecutions.

There is at least a difficulty in explaining this matter, unless we admit, that, in some instances, discretion might be sufficient to protect the believer without any sacrifice of honesty. But the very nature of the case must have rendered it dangerous for the Christian to hold much intercourse with the heathen world. His caution must have continually verged upon insincerity ; his silence upon a denial of his faith. A zealous and observant mind could not witness even a partial approach to such a compromise of the sterner virtues of holiness without alarm. But here

and there a section of the church, or some of its clergy, might be found who did not fear to indulge the weaknesses of professors to a degree which seemed to threaten permanent injury to Christian morality. It was impossible that a man like Tertullian could behold such a state of things, and not grieve over it, or make some effort to provide an antidote to the evil which it was working. We may easily imagine, therefore, how earnestly he would strive with his fellow-presbyters to preserve the primitive rule of discipline as well as faith ; or how he would endeavour to introduce, if necessary, new laws, and establish new defences, against the deceitful spirit which was insinuating itself into the church.

But if a reformer be commonly looked at with jealousy, he is sure to encounter a more than ordinary opposition, if he belong to a class of men who ought, as a body, to have either commenced the reform themselves, or to have carefully resisted the corruptions which rendered reform necessary. In such a case, his brethren will give no credit either to the superior discernment, or the loftier piety which distinguishes his character. They will be sensible to nothing but the fact that he is doing of his own accord, and at his single risk, what it was their duty to have done in common. This feeling is rarely favourable to the reformer. As it continues to act upon the minds of those around him, he finds his situation becoming every day more difficult and painful ; and if he be not miraculously supported, he is more likely to give an undue value to his own judgment, to increase in self-confidence and pride, than to weep and pray, and wait patiently for the revival of a better spirit in the party to which he belongs.

Tertullian appears to have been placed in the condition

here imagined. He was only a presbyter, but he had commanding talents, a clear apprehension, and fervent zeal. His words were not listened to. They rather provoked dislike. He considered that it would be in vain for him to struggle with the opposition to his advice ; and when a new party of professed believers in the gospel arose, and he imagined that they were prepared to carry out his own strictest views of discipline, he ceased to consider what he began to regard as minor points in church communion, and gladly joined himself to a people who seemed to his now prejudiced mind to possess so much more of the character of the elect of God.

From the moment Tertullian adopted these views, he employed the best powers of his mind in striving to justify the proceedings of Montanus. Asserting the gradual development of the evangelical system, he venerated the supposed prophet as destined to fulfil what had hitherto been left imperfect. "I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth is come, he shall lead you into all truth."* These were the words of our Lord ; and Tertullian observes on them, that the administration of the Paraclete was especially intended for the improvement of discipline, and the exalting of the mind to those higher and better things which were not at first explained. This was a notion which, in itself, seemed to involve no contradiction to the general character of divine dispensations. Tertullian, it is probable, fixed his thoughts so entirely upon the more spiritual and reasonable features of the system which Montanus taught, as to pass over its gloomy errors. History gives so uncertain an account of the whole matter, that

* John xvi. 12, 13.

one of the most learned of modern writers has himself represented it in two opposite lights.* Remarkable, indeed, it is that, on the one side, we should find it stated, that Montanus and Maximilla hanged themselves; that one of their favourite companions was carried up to the clouds by the devil, and then dashed to pieces on the earth; and that their followers were guilty of the grossest immorality; while, on the other, it is recorded that the party which Montanus formed became so powerful that it was able to resist the bishops of the church;† to draw within its circle many men no less eminent for wisdom than for piety; and to uphold in the face of the world a character for holy severity and devotion, which the larger portion of Christians seemed on the point of sacrificing to low and selfish views. To add to the difficulty of deciding aright, we have the concurrent testimony of antiquity to the high esteem in which the writings of Tertullian were ever held by the best and wisest men in the church. St. Cyprian would not pass a day without reading some portion of his works; and when he wished them to be brought him, his usual expression to the attendant was, "Give me the Master!"

According to the common accounts, Tertullian lived to extreme old age, and before his death formed a party of his own, which continued to exist for some years after his death. From the obscurity hanging over his history, there is one circumstance sufficiently exempt to render it of

* Mosheim, *De Rebus Christ. ante Constant. Sæcul. Secund. c. 66. History, Cent. ii. c. v.*

† One of the bishops of Rome is spoken of by Tertullian as having favoured the Montanists, and aided in restoring peace to the churches of Asia by acknowledging the prophecies of Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla.—*Adversus Praxeam, sec. i.*

great value to the serious inquirer. Notwithstanding his enthusiasm, and the errors into which it led him, he continued to uphold the doctrines of the primitive faith. Whatever the mysticism of many of his views, the articles of the Apostle's Creed are clearly stated in his writings. On these he insists with a force of expression which proves that, amid all his wanderings, he felt that to proclaim them in their purity and completeness was the main duty of a Christian teacher. Never was the importance of the creed, or of that system by which it had been handed down, from generation to generation, more strikingly shown than in this case. Had it not been for the strong conviction which he cherished, that the church had carefully transmitted the substance of the gospel, as our Lord himself and the apostles taught it, Tertullian would have been lost altogether in the labyrinths of heresy and speculation. But that which he knew to be fundamental truth, no temptation could induce him to disturb. He might dispute with the church on the subject of discipline ; he might question the nature of the means or the ministry through which divine doctrine was to be further expanded or developed ; but he dare not deny to the church its dignity and authority as a steward of divine mysteries. And this it was which, in spite of his errors, still continued to render him a powerful champion of the gospel ; which imbued his writings with spirituality and sanctity even while he yielded to many of the veriest fallacies ; and which has secured to him the veneration of the great and good of all ages, even of those who best understand and most deeply lament his abandonment of pure and simple catholicity.

Tertullian's summary of doctrine closely corresponds with that of Irenæus, and the other primitive fathers.

“There is one rule of faith” he says* “alone immoveable and unchangeable, that is, the belief in one Almighty God, the Creator of the world, and in his Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, rising from the dead the third day, ascending into heaven, and sitting on the right hand of God, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead, through the resurrection of the flesh.”† He adds, “This law of faith remaining, other matters of discipline and conversation admit the novelty of correction, the grace of God working and continuing to do so even unto the end.” In this, and the sentence immediately following, we have a safe guide in the examination of Tertullian’s views. The treatise from which the quotation is made, was written some time after he became a Montanist. We yet find him upholding the rule of faith, the summary of divine, essential truths exhibited in the Apostle’s creed, as immoveable and unchangeable, or not to be formed anew. Thus he restricts even the operations of the Paraclete to the perfecting of discipline, that word being taken, no doubt, in the highest sense of which it is capable, but still not interfering with the rule of faith. “For as the devil,” he says, “is ever working, and daily adding to the inventions of iniquity, can the work of God have ceased, especially seeing that the Lord has sent the Paraclete that, as human weak-

* De Virginibus Velandis, c. i.

† In another treatise, that against a heretic named Praxas, he has a similar summary of faith, but adds a declaration respecting the twofold nature of our Lord, of whom he says, “he was born of the virgin, man and God, son of man and son of God,” and also respecting the Holy Spirit, “sent according to his promise from the Father, the Holy Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”—c. ii.

ness could not receive all things at once, discipline might be gradually directed, ordained, and perfected by that vicar of the Lord, the Holy Spirit."

It may be fairly doubted whether Tertullian, though cut off from communion with the Roman presbyters, regarded himself as separated from the church itself. A careful reader of ecclesiastical history will not fail to observe, that as the number of Christians increased, and the distance between the world and the church became less and less, human feelings, human imaginations, as well as human interests, rolled in as a flood upon the province of heavenly truth. But though surrounded, and threatened with sudden overthrow, the truth itself remained distinct and safe; and it is the most interesting of all inquiries for a thoughtful mind to determine, how that which is essentially divine has been preserved from any mixture with that which is earthly; and how God's people, amid all possible temptations, and amid indescribable confusion, have been able to keep the faith first delivered to the saints, and to contend for it as something substantial, and as existing distinct from everything else, however similar, or however related to it as an agent, or a means, for promoting its establishment.

The writings of Tertullian furnish us with interesting information respecting the state and practices of the church in his days.* To understand the value of the

* "Whether we consider," says the bishop of Lincoln, "the testimony borne to the genuineness and integrity of the books of the New Testament, or the information relating to the ceremonies, discipline, and doctrines of the primitive church, Tertullian's writings form a most important link in that chain of tradition which connects the apostolic age with our own."—*Eccles. Hist. of Second and Third Cent.* p. 39.

accounts which he gives, it is necessary to bear in mind, that he wrote when only two hundred years had passed away since the consecration of the church on the day of Pentecost. The first fact of importance with which he acquaints us has been already alluded to,* the vast diffusion, that is, of the gospel in his times. The next is, that the public assemblies of Christians continued to be characterized by the same observances as those of the first century. "We are a body," he says, "existing as such from conscience of religion, from divinity† of discipline, from the covenant of hope. So too we come together into the assembly and congregation, that, as a single band, we may besiege God with prayer and supplications. And this violence is pleasing to God. And we pray for the emperors, for their ministers, and the powers of this world, for the quiet of affairs, and delay of the end. We are led to the consideration of divine scripture, if in anywise the due tendency of the present times renders admonition, or reflection necessary. Most true it is, we feed our faith by its holy words, exalt our hope, establish our confidence, confirm discipline by the inculcation of its precepts. There, too, exhortations, chastisements, and divine censure are employed. For judgment comes with great weight when it is pronounced by those who stand in the sight of God ; and it is a most solemn prelude to the future judgment, when any one has so sinned that he is cut off from the communication of prayer, and from all holy intercourse and conversation." And further : "Certain approved seniors preside over the congregation, men who have obtained the honour, not by money but by testimony, for money avails not in the things of God. If there be indeed a

* See page 112.

† Some readings have *truth* and others *unity* instead of divinity.

species of chest, it is not for the collection of money given by constraint, or for the purchase of religious privileges ; but every one makes a small contribution, on a certain day of the month, or on what day he pleases, and only as he pleases, and as he is able ; for no one is compelled, but he contributes of his own free will. And that which is thus bestowed is sacred to piety, for neither in eating nor in drinking, nor in any other kind of excess, is it expended, but in nourishing the poor, in providing for the burial of the destitute, in aiding distressed orphans, aged servants, and shipwrecked voyagers ; and if any on account of their devotion to the people of God have been condemned to the mines, or to exile or prison, they too are considered the peculiar care, the alumni, of their confession. But the operation of this kind of love has fixed a mark upon us in the sight of some. ‘Behold,’ they say, ‘how they love one another :’ for they indeed hate each other ; and, ‘how they are prepared to die for each other ;’ for, they are more ready to kill each other.”*

Tertullian’s tract on Baptism is one of the most interesting of his treatises. It is doubtful whether it was written before or after his alliance with the Montanists. But it was composed in opposition to a base and dangerous heresy, and may be considered, therefore, as expressing the opinions commonly entertained at that time on the subject of this sacrament.

“Happy,” says the writer, “is the sacrament of our water, by which being washed from the sins of our ancient blindness, we are liberated to eternal life. How great is that perverseness which so inclines men to corrupt the faith, or to reject it altogether, that they will even assail

* *Apologeticus adversus Gentes.* c. xxxix.

it on the score of those very principles in which its strength consists. For there is nothing which so hardens the minds of men as that simplicity of divine works which is seen *in the act*, and the magnificence of which is promised *in the effect*. As in the present instance, because with so much simplicity, and such a freedom from pomp, without any new apparatus, and without expense, a man being led to the water, and dipped while a few words are repeated, rises but little, if at all purer to outward appearance, by so much the more is his gaining eternity thereby considered beyond belief. I err, on the contrary, if the solemnities, the pomps and shows and luxury, of idolatry, are not the origin of its influence. But how miserable is the incredulity which denies to God his own properties, simplicity and power. What then? it may be asked: Is it not to be wondered at, that death should be washed away by a bath? We answer, that it is by so much the more worthy of belief, if, simply because it is to be wondered at, therefore it is not believed. For how can the works of God be otherwise than above all admiration? We ourselves wonder at them, but we wonder because we believe. Incredulity, on the other hand, wonders and believes not. For it wonders at simple things as vain; at that which is magnificent, as impossible. Even let it be as you suppose, yet the divine sentence has in both cases anticipated your notion. For, God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound its wisdom, and the things most difficult with men, are easy with God."* Since if God be both wise and powerful, which even those who neglect him do not deny, properly has he looked for the materials of his operations in that which is opposite to wisdom and

* 1 Cor. i. 27.

power, that is, in foolishness and impossibility. And this he does because all power derives the reason of its exercise from those things by which it is called into action.”*

This is followed by a beautiful and ingenious passage, describing the holiness of water, which, when all was dark and confused in the world of chaos, existed as a pure, simple, and gladsome element—a chariot, as it were, for God. To the waters, also, was the command first given to bring forth things which had life; and this was done that there might be no wonder if the waters should give life in baptism.† The blessed Spirit, brooding over the waters, imparted sanctity to the element itself, and thence a power to sanctify. “All waters, from the ancient prerogative of their origin, God being invoked, possess the sacrament of sanctification. For the Spirit of God immediately comes down from heaven, and rests upon the waters, sanctifying them by himself, and thus sanctified they have a sanctifying force.”‡

Having alluded to the pool of Bethesda, he says, “That figure of medicine for the body, proclaimed a spiritual medicine, according to the system by which carnal things in the way of figure ever precede spiritual things. Thus the grace of God, advancing among men, a greater influence was given to the waters and to the angel. They who before cured the diseases of the body now cure the soul. They who wrought a temporal salvation now restore the eternal. They who freed one in a year only, now daily save mankind at large, death being abolished by the washing away of sins. The charge being removed, the punishment is removed. Thus man, who had been in the image of God, is restored to God, according to

* De Baptismo. c. ii.

† c. iii.

‡ c. iv.

his likeness, the image being in form, the likeness in eternity.”*

Then follows this important passage :—“Not that we obtain the Holy Spirit in the waters, but being cleansed in the water, under the angel, we are prepared for the Holy Spirit. Here also the figure precedes. For so John was the forerunner of our Lord, preparing his way: and so the angel, as the witness of baptism, by that washing away of sins which faith sealed in the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost procures, marks out the way for the coming Spirit.”†

From the next chapter we learn, that the newly-baptized person, on ascending from the water, was anointed “with a blessed unction, according to ancient discipline.” And it is observed, that though the anointing is itself carnal, its use is spiritual, “even as the act of baptism itself is carnal, in respect to our being dipped in the water, while the effect is spiritual, in that we are freed from our sins.” Imposition of hands, with a solemn blessing and invocation of the Holy Spirit, followed, and the purified body was sanctified and enriched with his most precious grace.

The importance attached to baptism in this early age is sufficiently proved by an expression incidentally introduced by Tertullian. “It is declared,” he says, “that no one can attain to salvation without baptism, and that chiefly on the authority of our Lord’s words—‘unless a man be born of water, he has not life.’”‡ A question arose from this doctrine of the church as to the state of the apostles themselves, of whose baptism, with the exception of St. Paul’s, no mention is made in the New

* De Baptismo. c. v.

† c. vi.

‡ c. xii.

Testament. Tertullian argues for the probability of their having been baptized with John's baptism, or with some typical baptism, as when they were in the ship with Jesus, and were sprinkled with the spray of the sea—a popular notion, he says, but to which he himself gave little heed. So, also, of the fancy, that Peter was baptized in the sea ; “ for it is one thing to be sprinkled or overtaken by the violence of the waves, and another to be dipped with the discipline of religion.” But strongly as he insisted on the worth of baptism, and on its general necessity to salvation, he speaks of the possibility of faith procuring salvation, and attaining to the highest degrees of holiness, without it : for he says, “ It is rash to argue respecting the salvation of the apostles. The prerogative of their first election, and then of their individual conversation with Christ, might avail to confer upon them the collective advantages of baptism.* With that, I think, they followed him who promised salvation to every one who believes. ‘ Thy faith,’ he said, ‘ hath saved thee ;’ and, ‘ thy sins are forgiven thee ;’ and this he said to one who believed, but was not baptized.”†

Tertullian fully understood that those whom he opposed would take advantage of this concession, and argue that, if faith was sufficient, there was no need of baptism. To this he replies, that salvation might indeed, before the passion and resurrection of our Lord, have been obtained by a naked faith ; but that when faith was increased by a belief in the nativity, the sufferings and the resurrection of the Saviour, there was an increase to the sacrament ; a sealing of baptism ; a clothing, as it were, of faith, which before was naked, nor had any power without its

proper law: For the law of dipping was imposed, and the form prescribed. "Go," he says, "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

"With this law agrees that definite statement, 'Unless a man be born again of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,' and by this was faith bound to the necessity of baptism. Thence all who believed, were baptized. So Paul when he believed was baptized: and this is that which the Lord had commanded when he afflicted him with blindness: 'Arise,' he said, 'and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee what thou must do,' that is, be baptized, for that only was now wanting to him. He had learnt, and he believed, that the Nazarene was 'the Son of God.'"*

In the succeeding chapter, Tertullian alludes to the baptism of heretics, which he refuses to acknowledge, because it cannot be *the one baptism* spoken of in the gospel. Heretics, he says, having neither the same God, nor the same Christ, as the church. And this was a sentiment which few could oppose who knew the doctrines propounded by the heretics of those times, not one of which seems to have confessed the Almighty as revealed in Scripture, or to have believed in Christ as the Son of God and the Son of Man, as the only Redeemer and Saviour of the world. He speaks also of baptism as to be but once administered. "Jewish Israel has its daily washings, because it is defiled every day, to warn us against which the rule is given concerning the one washing. Happy the water which cleanses once for all; which is not a mere mockery to sinners; which does not, being

* De Baptismo. c. xiii.

continually infected with impurities itself, again polluting those whom it has cleansed.”*

And full of evangelical sweetness is the following : “ There is, indeed, to us a second washing, which is also one and the same, that is, the washing of blood ; concerning which the Lord said, *I have a baptism to be baptized with*, although he had been already baptized. For he came, as St. John writes, by water and blood,† that he might be baptized with water, and glorified by blood. And thence, that he might make us *the called* by water, and *the elect* by blood, he poured out these two baptisms from the wound of his pierced side. So that they who should believe in his blood might be washed with water, and that they who are washed with the water might drink the blood. This is the baptism which represents the washing if not yet received ; and which restores it when lost.”

He next speaks of the minister by whom baptism was to be performed. “ The chief priest,” he says, “ who is the bishop, has the right of conferring it. And after him, the presbyters and deacons, but not without the authority of the bishop, for the honour of the church, which being safe, peace is also safe. In other respects the right also belongs to the laity. For that which is equally received, may be equally given, unless learners be called bishops, or priests, or deacons. The word of the Lord ought not to be hidden. Whence the right of baptism also, which is equally the gift of God, may be exercised by all. But how much does the discipline of reverence and modesty become the laity ! Since that discipline of which we speak belongs to the greater, let them not assume the right of the bishop, or the duty of the episcopate. Emu-

* De Baptismo. c. xv.

† 1 John v. 6.

lation is the mother of schisms. 'All things are lawful,' said the most holy apostle, but all things are not expedient. Let it be enough that in cases of necessity you may use your liberty, as the circumstances of time or place or person compel you. For when we are in danger, acceptable is the constancy of him who comes to our relief. Guilty, indeed, of destroying a man is he, who, having it in his power to render help, neglects to do so."*

In perfect consistency with the stern and solemn feeling with which he regarded the whole circle of Christian responsibilities, Tertullian discouraged the growing custom of admitting persons to baptism on the mere expression of their wish to be received into the church. If Philip, he says, baptized the eunuch without delay, it was because the Lord plainly authorized his so doing. So also in the case of Paul. Simon† baptized him at once, for he knew that he was a vessel of election. "He who asks for baptism may deceive others, or he may be himself deceived. In every case, therefore, according to the circumstances, the disposition, and the age of the person, the delay of baptism is useful, and especially in that of young children. For why should the sponsors be exposed to danger? seeing that they themselves being mortal may neglect their promises, or be deceived by the intervention of a corrupt nature. The Lord, indeed, says, 'Forbid them not to come unto me.'‡ Let them, therefore, come when they have arrived at the age of youth; let them come whilst they are learning, whilst they are being taught, whither they come! Let them be made Christians when they are able to know Christ. Why hasten an innocent age to the

* De Baptismo. c. xviii

† Ananias.

‡ Matt. xix. 14.

remission of sins? We act more cautiously in worldly matters; so that they to whom we would intrust no earthly thing, are put in charge of that which is divine. Let them then first know to ask for salvation, that you at least seem to give to him asking.”*

In the concluding chapters, we have some account of the solemnity with which baptism was conferred. Easter is spoken of as the most proper season for the ceremony, because at that time the passion of our Lord, into which we are baptized, was fulfilled. Whitsuntide is represented as the next most convenient season, because during that period the first disciples enjoyed so many proofs of our Lord’s resurrection, the Holy Spirit was given, and the hope of the second advent awakened. “But,” he adds, “every day is the Lord’s; every hour, every season, may be chosen for baptism. The difference of time may affect the solemnity; but it interferes not with the grace.”†

Having impressed on those who intended to seek baptism, the necessity of prayer and fasting, and much watchfulness, he thus concludes:‡ “Therefore, ye blessed men, whom the grace of God awaits, when ye ascend out of that most holy laver of a new nativity, and in the presence of your mother first spread your hands among your brethren, ask of the Father, of the Lord who provideth them, possessions, graces, diversities of gifts, for he says, ‘Ask and ye shall receive.’ Ye have indeed sought, and ye have

* c. xviii.

† c. xix.

‡ In another tract he speaks more particularly of the ceremonies practised at baptism. The person, he says, was dipped thrice: on leaving the water he partook of a mixture of milk and honey; and for a whole week he abstained from the daily bath.—*De Corona Militis*, c. iii.

found : ye have knocked, and it has been opened unto you. Only I pray that when ye ask, ye may remember Tertullian, the sinner !”*

We have no complete treatise of Tertullian's on the other great sacrament of the church, the Lord's Supper ; but incidental allusions to it occur in his works, which are sufficient to show that neither he, nor the portion of the church to which he belonged, nor the party which he joined, regarded the holy mystery of the communion in any other light than that in which it had been viewed from the earliest times. Speaking of the church at Rome, he says, “ She mingles the law and the prophets with the Scriptures of evangelists and apostles. Thence she derives her faith. She signs it with water : she clothes it with the Holy Spirit ; *she feeds it with the Eucharist.*”†

In another treatise, he says, “ The sacrament of the Eucharist, commanded by our Lord at the last supper,‡ and to all, we receive in our assemblies held before the dawn of day ; nor do we receive it from the hand of any other than the presidents.” “ We are distressed,” he adds, “ if any portion of the wine or bread fall to the ground.”§ In his tract written against the heretic Marcion, he speaks of the sacrament of the bread and of the cup as proving the truth, or reality, of the body and blood of the Lord, in opposition to the notion of the heretic, that they were but a phantasm.||

Speaking, in his treatise on Prayer, respecting the kiss of charity, he says, “ What *sacrifice* is there from which

* c. xx.

† De Præscript. Hæret. c. xxxvi.

‡ In tempore victus, et omnibus mandatum a Domino.

§ De Corona Militis. c. iii.

|| Adversus Marcionem. l. v. c. viii.

we depart without peace?"* And in another passage he says, "Does the Eucharist free us from the performance of any other duty to God? Does it not rather bind us to him? Will not thy station be the more solemn if you stand before the altar of God? The body of the Lord being received and reserved, both duties are performed, the participation of the *sacrifice*, and the fulfilment of the rite."† In another tract he speaks of the offering up of the *sacrifice*;‡ and it is easy to understand how much use may be made of these passages by those who support the doctrine of the real presence. "When however," it has been observed,§ "the different passages in which he speaks of the body and blood of Christ are compared together, it will be evident that he never thought of any corporeal presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He speaks, indeed, 'of feeding on the fatness of the Lord's body,' that is, on the Eucharist; and 'of our flesh feeding on the body and blood of Christ, in order that our soul may be fattened of God.' These, it must be allowed, are strong expressions; but when compared with other passages in his writings, they will manifestly appear to have been used in a figurative sense. Thus in commenting upon the clause in the Lord's Prayer, '*give us this day our daily bread*,' he says, that we should understand it spiritually. 'Christ is one bread: for Christ is life, and bread is life. Christ said, *I am the bread of life*; and, a little before, *The Word of the living God which descended from heaven, that is bread*. Moreover, his body is reckoned (or supposed) to

* De Oration. c. xiv. † Ib. c. xiv.

‡ De Cultu Feminarum. c. xi.

§ Bishop of Lincoln. Eccles. Hist. of First and Second Cent. p. 154

be in the bread, in the words, *This is my body.*' It is evident from the whole tenure of this passage, that Tertullian affixed a figurative interpretation to the words, *This is my body.* In other places, he expressly calls the bread, *the representation* of the body of Christ; and the wine, of his blood."*

The works of Tertullian contain allusions to many opinions and customs prevalent in his times, which plainly show the rapid growth of the system whereby it was sought, in a later age, to represent every inward motion, every degree of faith, every species of reverence for holy things, by an outward sign or gesture. Not the minutest office was performed without the mark of the cross being made on the forehead. "In all our journeys and undertakings" says Tertullian, "in our coming in and going out; when we dress ourselves; when we put on our shoes; when we bathe; when we come to table; when the candles are lit; when we recline or sit down; whatsoever we do, we sign our foreheads with the little sign of the cross."† So too he incidentally mentions, that it was the general custom in his days for Christians to pray towards the East;‡ and to lift up, and spread their hands in prayer, as representing the passion of our Lord.§ These various customs he defends on the score of tradition, which also he contends ought undoubtedly to be received, though not written, if of general and ancient growth.|| But the tradition to which he thus alludes, is not to be confounded with that which in his work against Marcion

* "Acceptum panem et distributum discipulis, corpus illius suum fecit, *hoc est corpus meum* dicendo, id est, *figura corporis mei.*"—*Adv. Marcionem*, lib. iv. c. 40.

† *De Corona Milit.* c. iii.

‡ *Apolog.* c. xvi.

§ *De Orat.* c. xi.

|| *De Corona Milit.* c. iii.

he distinctly describes as *Apostolic Tradition* ; and to the pure, unchanging character of which he attributes the perseverance of the church of Christ in the confession of firm and fundamental truth.* What was the age of some of the practices of which he speaks it is impossible to determine ; but they were evidently at the period when he wrote, of no very late origin. Among the most remarkable is the custom of praying for the dead and of offering up oblations in their behalf, which is represented as the common duty of Christian charity and domestic affection.† In respect to fasting, he tells us, that the only fast established by authority, was that which precedes Easter. Others, indeed, were observed, such as those weekly fasts of Wednesday and Friday, and some prescribed by the bishops of particular churches ; but the duty of keeping them was not a matter of command ; and the mode of observing them, and the period of their duration, was in great measure left to be determined by the conscience of the individual.

It ought not to be forgotten that, though Tertullian had already separated himself from the orthodox when some of the works in which these allusions occur were written, their value as materials for history are but little affected thereby. The customs of which he speaks were those of the church, of the great body of believers, in his times. He describes them as the well-known characteristics of their manners, and of the worship practised among them. Whether they agreed or disagreed with the primitive rule, or example, of the church as established by the apostles, does not affect the testimony of Tertullian to their existence in his age, or in those which immediately preceded it. The reader of ecclesiastical history cannot be too

* Adv. Marcionem, lib. i. c. 21. † De Monogamia. c. x.

frequently warned against confounding the historical account of the prevalence of particular customs or doctrines, with the theological inquiry into their bearing upon divine truth, and the general interests of religion. Had it not been chiefly for the purpose of illustrating the state of religion historically, that the writers above spoken of were referred to, many passages might have been extracted from their works far more interesting and edifying when spiritually considered.

Thus in the first century there flourished not only St. Clement, St. Ignatius, and Polycarp, known disciples of the apostles, but also St. Barnabas, still more closely allied to those blessed men, and whose Epistle represents in deep, strong lines the true image of primitive simplicity and holiness. There was also another author of the same early age named Hermas, who wrote a work entitled "The Shepherd." So greatly did some of the fathers esteem this book, that it was occasionally read publicly in the churches. Like the other writings of the first century, it affords little information respecting the existence of any of those complicated forms of either opinion or discipline which we find growing up in the following age. There is, however, even in this work, a species of mysticism which proves that there was, from the first, a vast fund of mere opinion created by the zeal of pious men—a multitude of notions received and propounded with more or less confidence, and tending to render it doubtful whether the faith, as once delivered to the saints, was sufficient in itself for all the purposes of edification.

Hermas does not actually state the belief of the church in his times, but rather suggests what the Christian might be expected to receive as the rule of faith and practice. Thus he says, that he had heard some learned

persons affirm, that there is no other repentance but that of baptism, when, being immersed in the sacred laver, we receive remission of sins. To this observation, the angel, with whom he represents himself as conversing, replies, that baptism is not properly repentance, but remission; and that repentance is permitted by God to those only who having been called, and numbered among the elect, have unhappily fallen through the artifice and malice of the devil. This repentance will avail once, but not as often as the sinner who wantonly breaks the law of God desires; for it is difficult to suppose that such a one can live again before God.

According to Hermas, every man has two attendant angels, the one good, and the other bad. If the love of righteousness, if modesty, charity, and other similar virtues possess the heart, then we may believe that the good angel is with us; but when bitterness, anger, and the desire of earthly enjoyments possess us, then we must confess ourselves to be under the power of the evil spirit. Of a good and holy man, he says, that when such a one, having the Spirit of God, comes into the church of the righteous and believers, and prayer is made to God, "then the holy messenger of Divinity fills that man with the blessed Spirit, and he speaks in the assembly as the Lord wills. Thus the Spirit of Divinity is known in whomsoever the Spirit of Divinity speaks."*

The picture which he draws of the church, after the vision presented to him, furnishes us with a striking proof of the importance attached in his times to unity and unbroken communion. It was as a lofty and glorious tower that the church appeared to his enraptured gaze. Careful

* Lib. ii. c. 12.

was the labour employed upon the stones chosen to form part of the building. Miserable the fate of those whose lot it was to be rejected. Twelve mountains, that is, the various nations of the world, afforded the stones for the erection of the tower ; and many are the spiritual mysteries alluded to in the account given of the process whereby it at length acquired its predestined perfection and magnificence.

Several writers of inferior note lived in the early part of the second century. They appear to have exercised but little influence on the state of the church. St. Clement of Alexandria was the first Christian author who entered deeply and systematically into theological speculation ; and there was a charm in his style, for some minds, which could not fail to affect their future character as witnesses of the truth. At the foundation of St. Clement's reasoning lay the acknowledged principle that the Scriptures, though clear in the literal sense, yet contain many hidden truths, which only the elect of God can penetrate. And this he proved by the words of our Lord, that it was given to some to understand, but to others not ;* and on the expression, " He that hath ears to hear, let him ear." The Old Testament is also quoted to illustrate the same notion :—" He made darkness his secret place ; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed." The Psalmist, he says, " teaching hereby that sacred doctrine is, as it were, hidden amid dark clouds, which pass harmlessly away at the Divine command, when those who are endowed with wisdom approach. Or it is as when burning

* Matt. xiii. 11.

coals are apparently extinguished, and will not throw forth any heat again, or give light, till some one fans them into a flame.”*

And many are the reasons, he says, why Scripture thus hides its deeper meaning. Of these, the first is, that we may be induced to employ diligent inquiry and devout earnestness in the pursuit of divine knowledge. Another is, that it might be dangerous for all men to be made acquainted with everything taught by the Holy Spirit, lest they should, in their unconverted state, be induced to corrupt his word ; † whence it is to those who are chosen, and to those who have been prepared for knowledge by faith, that the mysteries of Scripture are committed. ‡ So also, the truth is not the property of all. “ It conceals its virtue in various ways ; and makes its light to shine on those alone who are initiated in the pursuit of knowledge, and love truth itself because of its connexion with charity.”

This view of divine doctrine as secret, because mysterious and spiritual, naturally led St. Clement to contend for the importance of tradition. Speaking of his immediate predecessors, he says, “ They preserved the true tradition of the blessed doctrine, deriving it from the holy apostles, Peter and James, and John and Paul, the son receiving it from the father. And, by God’s mercy, they have reached to our times, still sowing that ancient and apostolic seed.”§

Explanations of mysteries so profound as those which occupied the thoughts of God’s most favoured saints, could not, it is supposed, be committed to writing. Thus, St. Paul is quoted as speaking to the Romans of imparting to

* Psalm xviii. 11, 12. † Stromat. lib. vi. p. 671. ‡ Ib. 676.

§ Stromatum, lib. i. p. 322.

them some "spiritual gift;" and of visiting them "in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ,"* meaning thereby that he would make known to them the tradition of the illuminated,† or afford some fuller revelation of Divine things than they had as yet received. So, too, his statement to the Corinthians: "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, which come to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom."‡ And according to his usual manner of illustrating his views by an appeal to the ancient philosophers, he refers to the sentiment of Plato, who, treating of God, says, "I must speak of him in enigmas, so that if anything happen to this tablet on which I write, he who finds it may not understand what he reads." And again: "Take heed, lest you have cause to lament the unworthy publication of such things." And—"The best guard we can set over them is not to write them, but to be contented with learning them."

"Knowledge itself," says St. Clement, "is that which has been handed down from the apostles to a few, and without writing. Hence, knowledge, or wisdom, ought to be continually exercised till it attain to the practice of eternal and unchanging contemplation."§ But that the tradition here spoken of was not independent of Scripture, we learn from another passage, in which he says,

* Rom. xv.

† The title given by St. Clement to those acquainted with the whole range of evangelical mysteries is *Gnostics*, that is, wise or learned persons; but the same title was also assumed by a numerous class of heretics who arose soon after the time of the apostles.

‡ 1 Corin. ii. 6, 7.

§ Stromatum, lib. vi. p. 771.

“They who have left the right way, are deservedly to be deceived in many things, wanting as they are in the power of distinguishing between true and false. For if their judgment was exercised in this respect they would obey the divine Scriptures. But as a man ceases to be one when changed, like those who were infected by the poison of Circe, so does he cease to belong to God, or to be faithful to the Lord, who spurns at ecclesiastical tradition, and wantonly rushes into the belief of heretics. He, on the other hand, who repents of his error, and obeys the scriptures, conforming his life to the truth, becomes, as it were, divine instead of human. For the beginning of our doctrine is the Lord, who, by the prophets, and the gospel, and the blessed apostles, at sundry times, and in divers manners,* has carried on the line of our knowledge from the first to the last.”†

Speaking, in the passage following this, on the occasional necessity of demonstrating certain truths, he says, “If it be not sufficient simply to state what we mean, but proof be required, then we do not look for the testimony of men, but we prove what is questioned by the voice of the Lord, which is more worthy of faith than any demonstration ; or rather, it is the only demonstration, for it is the science by which they who have tasted Scripture become believers.”‡

The view which St. Clement gives of baptism is that found generally in the writings of the ancient fathers. “Moved by repentance,” he says, “and renouncing our former sins, we are purified by baptism, and so return to the light, as children to their father.”§ And further, “Knowledge is the illumination which takes away igno-

* Hebrews i. 1.

† Stromatium, lib. vii. 890.

‡ Ib. 891.

§ Paedagog. lib. i. c. 6.

rance, and supplies its place by the faculty of sight. It is the casting away of the worse, and the revelation of the better : for what ignorance bound upon us, that knowledge loosens and removes. But these fetters, how quickly are they broken ! not by human faith, indeed, but by divine grace. Our sins are remitted by the application of one medicament, by baptism, that is, according to the Word. We wash away all our sins. We no longer walk in wickedness. For this is the one grace of illumination, that we are no longer what we were before we were washed. Knowledge springs up with that illumination, shining resplendent about the mind, and we who before were uninstructed straightway hear ourselves called disciples. May this be ascribed to any previous discipline ? You cannot name the time when it could take place. For catechizing led to faith ; but faith with baptism is taught by the divine Spirit. There is one universal saving power* for human nature, and it is faith." And shewing the equal mercy of God to those who believe, he quotes the testimony of St. Paul : " Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek ; there is neither bond nor free ; there is neither male nor female ; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."† Whence he draws the conclusion, that there are not some wise or enlightened,‡ and some only in a state of nature, in the same *word*, but that all, having put off their carnal dispositions, are equal and spiritual before the Lord.§

This acknowledgment will help to explain much of what he says in other places respecting the separation of

* Literally one catholic salvation of humanity. † Gal. iii. 26, 27, 28.

‡ That is, *Gnostics*.

§ Pædagog. lib. i. p. 116.

those whom he calls *Gnostics* from the mass of pretended inquirers or believers ; and will also throw light on many of his statements concerning the secret character of divine truth ; it being evidently not his intention to confine the communication of any portion of holy doctrine to the wise or learned, commonly so called, but to describe the mystery of godliness as to be understood by those only whose hearts are prepared to receive it. The poorest, the most ignorant, in all other respects, might when renewed and sanctified be partakers with the most enlightened in the study of the sublimest truths ; but till humbled by repentance, regenerated by baptism, united by the Spirit to Christ, the wonderful things of the gospel were not to be spoken of in a loose and common way, even to the most refined or the most learned of mankind.

Several allusions occur in the writings of St. Clement to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Thus he says,* "The blood of the Lord is twofold. For the one whereby we are redeemed from destruction is carnal : but the other whereby we are anointed, is spiritual. And hence, to drink the blood of Jesus, is to become partakers of the incorruption of the Lord. The power of the Word is the Spirit, as that of the flesh is the blood." And further : "The mixture of the two, that is, of the cup and of the *Word* is called *Eucharist*, that is, grace, lovely and worthy to be praised, whereby they who partake of it are sanctified both in body and mind. The divine mixture, man, the will of the Father mystically forms by the Spirit and the Word. For as the Spirit dwells in the soul which it sustains, so does the flesh in the Word, through which the Word became flesh."†

* *Pædagog.* lib. ii. c. ii. p. 177.

† *Ib.* lib. ii. c. ii. p. 178.

Again : " The Word is in various ways spoken of allegorically, and thus it is called meat, and flesh, and nourishment ; and bread, and blood, and milk. The Lord, indeed, is everything, for the good and enjoyment of those who trust in him."* Alas ! this food, so proper for us, the Lord affords ; giving us his flesh, and pouring out his blood ; and thus nothing is wanting to our growth as children. O wonderful mystery ! He commands us to put off our old and carnal corruption, and with it to cease from our former food ; and to become partakers of the new nourishment, even of Christ, so that, receiving him, if possible, we may place him in our very hearts, and overcome all our carnal affections. The Holy Spirit speaks to us allegorically of the flesh, for the flesh was fabricated by him. The blood signifies the Word, for as rich blood, so is the Word infused into our life. But the mixture of the two together is the Lord, the true nourishment of babes. The Lord, who is the Spirit and the Word. The nourishment, that is, the Lord Jesus, the Word of God, the Spirit incarnate, sanctified, heavenly flesh !"†

Whatever were the refinements and speculations of St. Clement, it is evident from these passages that he ascribed salvation, with all the attendant mysteries of a new birth, justification, and spiritual enlightenment to the merits, and the power, and the presence of Christ. Hitherto, therefore, we have seen nothing, in the remaining records of the first two centuries, to throw a doubt upon the important and most comforting fact, that the teachers and most illustrious ornaments of Christ's Universal Church preserved undiminished and uncorrupted the precious de-

* Pædagog. lib. i. c. 11. p. 126.

† Ib. 124.

posit committed to their charge. This, indeed, must be allowed, that in such writers as Clement, Tertullian, and Origen, we meet with many things which savour far more of human ingenuity, or a bold imagination, than of pure, divine doctrine. But still the doctrine itself is safe. No effort is made to lower the authority on which its truth is established. Christ and his word are ever appealed to as sovereign arbiters of opinion in every case in which it can be distinctly brought before their tribunal. The introduction of other subjects than those immediately propounded by the Creed, may be easily accounted for by a consideration of the altered circumstances in which Christian writers were now placed. How different was the position of Clement of Alexandria from that of Clement of Rome! As the world began to inquire more and more into the nature of the faith, so much the more was a stimulant given to the power of argument and invention. Sufficient, indeed, for those who loved the gospel for its own sake were its blessed invitations and promises. But when the more eminent of its converts came to a trial of strength with the scholars and philosophers of the world, it was almost impossible for them to resist the temptation of showing analogies, adducing examples and arguments, as derivable from the general sources of human knowledge. If their own private notions gradually insinuated themselves into the better proof of evangelical truth, how easily may this be accounted for by the commonest lessons taught in the history of human opinion. And if the notions thus at first sedately propounded by a few venerated individuals, became in time closely mixed up with doctrines and principles confessedly divine, we see in this circumstance but another natural consequence of the growth of the visible church, the less thoughtful and spiritual

members of which would not be likely to inquire very rigidly into the sources of its belief or practices, while many of the most devout, combining deep humility with their zeal, would shrink from questioning the value of opinions, or the propriety of observances, which had been approved by confessors, saints, and martyrs.

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH OF THE EMPEROR ALEXANDER SEVERUS—HIS SUCCESSORS—MAXIMINUS—PHILIP THE ARABIAN—NOTICE OF GREGORY THAUMATURGUS—ST. CYPRIAN—PERSECUTION UNDER DECIUS—ORIGIN OF MONASTICISM.

ALEXANDER SEVERUS had exercised so much indulgence towards the Christians, that he was regarded by many as a convert to their faith. Origen had been invited to the court, that he might expound to the Emperor's mother, Mammæa, the principles and evidences of the gospel. Many of the bishops, most distinguished for their piety and learning, enjoyed similar marks of imperial favour; and the church at large was for several years lapped in almost profound repose. When Alexander fell by the swords of his rebellious troops, and the northern barbarian, Maximinus, was raised by the mere revolt of a camp to the throne of the Cæsars, the affairs of the church assumed a very different aspect. The new emperor naturally beheld with jealousy the friends of his murdered predecessor, and among the foremost of those who delighted to do honour to his memory were the eminent Christians, who had fondly cherished the hope of seeing him become not simply a tolerant ruler, but a faithful member of their communion. It was upon these, the chiefs of the church, that the fury of Maximinus was poured. Satiating himself with their sufferings, he scarcely cared to persecute the meaner members of the community;

and his short reign of three years, however fatal to the higher order of the clergy, would have affected in only a slight degree the ordinary professors of the gospel. But several of the provinces were exposed at this period to awful visitations. In some, desolation was spread far and wide by a raging pestilence; in others, tempests and earthquakes swept away the people, or reduced them to a state of famine. Groaning under these calamities, the wretched multitude sought to account for their misery by acknowledging that the gods had just cause to be angry at finding their temples deserted, and their altars without sacrifices. No sooner was this notion familiarised to the mind, than the people resolved to employ what seemed to them the surest means of atoning for their past neglect. The Christians, accordingly, were attacked with irresistible fury; and while the chief of the clergy suffered at the command of the emperor, many of the humbler classes of believers died under the attacks of the populace.

Happily, the reign of Maximinus was as short as it was cruel. That of the Gordians was almost as brief. Philip the Arabian, who raised himself to the throne by the murder of his predecessor, retained that eminence for four or five years, and then yielded, as the penalty of his own crime, his life and throne to the dagger of his rival, Decius. But whether really touched by repentance, or desirous of securing the help of a party, the strength of which was confessedly great,* Philip became a strenuous and open friend of the Christians. Such was his apparent anxiety to conciliate their favour, and to make himself a partaker of their spiritual blessings, that he entered a church on the eve of the Easter festival, and hastened

* Tertullian Apolog. xxxvii.

towards the altar. But the presiding minister arrested his progress, and solemnly announced that he could not allow him, high as his station was, to engage in the worship of Christ till he had openly declared his sorrow for the sins which he had committed, and sought, like other penitents, reconciliation with Heaven. Philip, it is said, devoutly acknowledged the right of the bishop to reprove his error ; and evinced, by his subsequent conduct, the sincerity of his respect for the Christian sanctuary.* Great doubts, however, are entertained as to the reality of his conversion. The public games and ceremonies were performed in his time, and at his expense, with more than ordinary splendour ; and there is therefore good reason to suspect that, though he might be more inclined than his predecessors to venerate the gospel, he never actually received it as the word of God.

The tranquillity enjoyed by the church during the few years that persecution slept was not favourable to the growth of holiness. We learn from a story, told by Tertullian, that Christians were beginning to frequent, like the rest of the world, those places of public amusement which they had hitherto shunned as peculiarly injurious and unholy. Some Christian lady, it is said, was suddenly found to be labouring under demoniacal possession. When the exorcist came, and the evil spirit was sharply rebuked for daring to assail a Christian, he immediately answered, that he had a full right to take possession of her, and enter her heart, for that he had found her on his own domains.†

It was well for the church that, while many circum-

* Eusebius Eccles. Hist. lib. vi. c. xxxiv.

† Tertullian de Spectaculis, c. xxvi.

stances existed which had a tendency to lower the tone of its piety, the Divine Spirit, and the providence of God, were employed in daily renewing its inward strength, and in raising up champions for the truth, characterized by that lofty and fervent piety so peculiarly valuable when religion is exposed to more than common dangers.

Among the great men thus given to the age of which we are speaking, was Gregory Thaumaturgus, already spoken of as a scholar of Origen. This remarkable man was a native of Neocæsarea, in Pontus, and was descended from a family both noble and wealthy. His original name was Theodorus, that of Gregory being assumed at baptism; while his additional appellation of Thaumaturgus, or the wonder-worker, was derived from the admiration excited by the miracles which he is commonly reported to have wrought.

Originally devoted to the study of the law, he was preparing to visit Rome, that he might place himself under the most eminent professors of jurisprudence. One of his relatives, however, being established at Cæsarea, in Palestine, as assessor to the president of the province, he was induced to make a journey to that city, whence he proposed to go to Berytus, then celebrated for its schools of civil law. But all his plans were changed when he became acquainted with Origen. As he listened to the eloquent discourses of that wonderful man, he felt in his heart that the study of truth, and especially of divine truth, was the only occupation to which he could happily devote the whole energy of his mind. Instead of this feeling losing its strength or warmth as he became more familiar with the gospel, it daily gathered new force. His admiration and affection for his master were mingled with awe; and he hesitated not to confess his belief, that the expositions

which he daily heard with so much delight, were, substantially, the fruit of a holy inspiration.*

Gregory, it is said, spent eight years at Cæsarea, when duty and his friends obliged him to return to his own country. It was with a sad heart that he looked forward to that career of worldly occupation for which he appeared to be destined. He wept at finding himself deprived of those sources of wisdom and consolation which he had enjoyed with Origen. But, at the same time, his mind was comforted by calling to recollection the promises of the Saviour; and he became more and more convinced that whatever might be necessary to his future usefulness and happiness, Jesus would accomplish for him.

In these hopes he was confirmed by the letters of Origen, who did not fail to express his wish that he might be able to devote his life altogether to the duties of a spiritual and heavenly calling. Gregory was too deeply imbued already with the love of the gospel not to be strongly moved by these exhortations. They soon, therefore, produced their effect. He resigned the property which came to him by inheritance, and having thus voluntarily reduced himself to poverty, retired into a solitary part of the country, where he employed the whole of his time in prayer, and in the study of Scripture.

The piety of Gregory had not been unobserved by the Christians of the neighbourhood. Phedimus, bishop of Amasea, resolved that such eminent endowments should not be lost to the church. By one of those proceedings, the exact nature of which we can so little understand in these days, he caused him, while absent three days' journey from the city, and not yet in holy orders, to be

* Panegyrica Oratio. c. xiv.

elected bishop of Neocæsarea. Gregory was persuaded to obey the call which he had thus received. He left his solitude, and returned to the city. But before he took upon himself the charge to which he was appointed, he desired to meditate with increased care on the main doctrines of the faith. For this purpose, he spent the night in profound devotion, when a vision it is said of two divine persons, was presented to his sight, and he heard from their lips a full and clear summary of heavenly doctrine.

Whatever may be thought of the nature of the vision, it is gratifying again to find another of the great and eminent authorities of the church resting his whole confidence, as a teacher of Christ's people, on that primitive creed, so apostolic and so simple, so ample and yet so closely harmonizing with Scripture, which Irenæus, and the other holy men already quoted, assumed as the basis of their teaching.

“There is but one God, Father of the Living Word ;” but this first article of the creed is followed by a fuller description of his nature, his wisdom and substantial power and eternity, which indicates that some strong feeling of the approaching troubles in the church, arising from heresy, was already working in the minds of its most faithful ministers. “There is but one Lord, One of One ; God of God, the character and image of the Godhead ; the efficacious Word, the wisdom comprehending universal existence ; the efficacious power of all things ; the true Son of the true Father ; the incorruptible Son of the incorruptible, the immortal of the immortal, the eternal of the Eternal. And there is one Holy Spirit, existing and proceeding from God ; and who has been manifested to man by the Son ; the perfect image of the perfect Son ; the life, and the source of life ; the sacred fountain ; the

author of sanctification ; through whom God the Father who is above all, and through all, is manifested ; and God the Son, who pervades all things. A perfect Trinity, without division or difference in glory, eternity, or dominion. There is, therefore, nothing created or dependent in the Trinity ; nothing added or adventitious ; nothing existing in it now, which did not exist in it before ; the Father was never without the Son, nor the Son without the Holy Spirit ; but the Trinity has ever been unchanged and unchangeable.”*

Other summaries of doctrine are ascribed to Gregory Thaumaturgus ; and it has been supposed, from some of the expressions contained in his works, that the growing spirit of controversy obscured the clearness and purity of his earlier conceptions of the faith. However this may be, the outline of his belief, as given above, is plainly such as might be drawn from the writings of the most spiritual of the fathers, if we except those additional expressions which owed their origin to the wish of meeting, by counter statements, the bold speculations, now beginning to be common even among members of the church. So greatly was it venerated not only by the cotemporaries of Gregory ; but by his successors, that it continued for many ages, to be the public confession of the church at Neocæsarea. It was the form according to which the catechumens were prepared to profess their faith at baptism ; and devout men did not hesitate to declare their conviction that it was by his firm adherence to the rule of faith, thus set forth, that Gregory gained so great a power over

* The concluding sentence, but without sufficient reason, is supposed to have been added to the confession by St. Gregory of Nyssa. Rufinus and others commonly ascribe the whole to Gregory Thaumaturgus himself.—Ceillier, t. iii. c. xvii. art. ii.

the minds of the people, and was enabled to deliver so many from the state of darkness and wickedness in which he found them.

At the period when he was appointed to the bishopric, not more than seventeen Christians could be found in the city over which he was placed. But his reputation for piety and learning tended greatly to dispose the minds of the people in his favour. On his journey from the country, in the wilds of which he would still have so gladly lingered, he wrought, it is said, many miracles. By one of these, according to common tradition, he expelled the evil spirit from a heathen temple, and convinced the priest himself of the power of the gospel and its teachers. The night had overtaken him : a furious tempest added to the horrors of the hour, and the solitude of the road. The only place of shelter was the temple ; and St. Gregory passed under its portals with fear and trembling. To his pious soul, the very air about its altars seemed infectious and deadly ; and it was not till he had often invoked the name of Christ, and signed himself with the cross, that he could compose his thoughts to prayer and meditation. By degrees, the atmosphere about him seemed to become light and pure. The temple was no longer haunted by demons ; and the praises and supplications of the saint, addressed to the living God, rose freely and gladly to heaven. Thus passed the night. At the dawn of day, the priest entered the temple, and prepared to perform the customary rites. He looked in vain for the wonted signs of acceptance. In vain he listened for an answer from the oracle. At length the evil spirit murmured, that a Christian had expelled him from his altars. Gregory, on being questioned by the priest, declared that he had power to expel or bring back the demons. The proof which he gave of this, convinced

the priest of the power of Christ and his ministers, and would, it is said, have immediately converted him, had he not been offended at the statement that Christ was God incarnate.

When St. Gregory entered Neocæsarea, he had neither house nor lodging to which he could repair. His own patrimony he had long since resigned ; and those who followed him were as poor and destitute as himself. But the reverence in which he was held, the charm of his discourse, his pure and heavenly virtues, speedily procured him friends, and a wealthy citizen gladly received him as his guest.

A brief period served to establish St. Gregory in the affections of the people. He convinced them of their errors ; awakened their consciences to a sense of the fearful condition in which idolatry had placed them ; and then put forth the whole power of the grace with which he was endowed to heal their infirmities, and to deliver them from the calamities which either Satan, or their own follies, had brought upon them.

The influence which he thus gained was not confined either to his own times or his own diocese. One of the first results of his popularity was the collection of funds for the building of a church. A lofty edifice was speedily erected in a conspicuous part of the city, and subsequent ages regarded it as a memorial, miraculously preserved, of the virtues of its founder.

It happened that the neighbouring city of Comana had received the gospel not long before the time of which we are speaking. But as yet no regular ministry was established in the place ; and the most enlightened members of the community besought Gregory to come over to them, and aid them in the choice of a bishop. Their request

was granted ; and on the day appointed, the Christians assembled in full congregation to elect their future pastor. Many learned, many eloquent men were spoken of. But Gregory remarked, that they ought not to confine their choice to those who were distinguished among them. There were others, he said, among the poor and obscure, whose virtues and spiritual-mindedness might well fit them for the office of a Christian bishop. On this, one of the principal citizens laughed, and said, that if a bishop might indeed be selected from among the humbler ranks, he should vote for the election of Alexander, the charcoal-burner. The rest said the same ; and when Gregory asked who this Alexander was, one of the company immediately led forward a man half covered with rags, and the dust of the charcoal in which he had been working. A general laugh followed the appearance of this strange candidate for a bishopric. But the man himself manifested no signs of embarrassment ; and when Gregory, moved by his intellectual countenance and dignity, drew him aside, and inquired into his real character, he frankly answered, that he was of a higher rank than that to which he seemed to belong ; but that, anxious to escape the temptations of youth and fashion, he had embraced a life of poverty and labour, and was well content to remain in that state so that he might but advance in knowledge and holiness.

In the examination to which Gregory subjected him, he fully proved the sincerity of these professions, and the natural strength of his understanding. The examination being finished, Gregory desired that he might be invested with the robes which he gave into the hands of some attendants. He himself then returned to the assembly, and occupied its attention with a discourse on the duties of a bishop, till Alexander was ready to appear

in his new garb. The congregation received the charcoal-burner on his return with expressions of surprise at his changed appearance. They had before venerated his virtues; and their conviction of his worth was now strengthened by his noble countenance and demeanour. Gregory straightway proceeded to consecrate the bishop thus singularly chosen; and the ceremony was followed by a discourse, addressed to the people by Alexander himself.

By men like these some check was given to the progress of corruption among the professors of the gospel. Origen has spoken in a manner which justifies the suspicion that, even in this early age, the very offices of the church were sought by many with no other desire than that of making a gain of divine things.* The fame of Cyprian, like that of Gregory, shines out in noble contrast to the low and worldly character by which it thus appears many of the ministers of religion were beginning to disgrace their calling.

This great and holy man, whose original name was Thascius, was born in the city of Carthage, of a noble and illustrious family. As he advanced in years, his abilities added fresh dignity to his station; and as he was no less liberal than wealthy, none of the distinguished men of Carthage could boast a greater number of followers or admirers. Such was the reputation which he enjoyed as an eloquent speaker, that, according to the fashion of the times, he was entreated to give lectures on the study of rhetoric. In this employment he spent some years. But though celebrated for the refinement of his intellect, he was not free from the ordinary vices and

* In Matt. t. xi. Op. t. iii. p. 490, 501.

follies of the world. To divine things his mind was as much opposed as that of less enlightened disbelievers. He tells us himself,* that before his conversion he lay in darkness and gloomy night ; that he knew not what path to choose amid the troubled waves of the world ; that he was ignorant of the means of life ; and obstinately opposed to the truth and the light.

The doctrine which appears to have first attracted his attention to the gospel, and to have excited at the same time a mingled feeling of doubt and animosity in his mind, was that of regeneration by baptism. "How difficult, how incomprehensible," he says in a letter to his friend Donatus, "the notion seemed to me, that a man endowed with new life in the laver of saving water, could cease to be what he was before ! That a man, the substance of his body remaining the same, should become changed in mind and spirit ! How is such a conversion possible, I used to say, that habits which have grown strong by indulgence should suddenly be overcome, and driven from the minds which they have possessed for years ? It was thus I reasoned with myself, for I was held fast bound in the chains of error, nor could I believe it possible that I should ever be set free. Despairing, therefore, of any thing better, I yielded myself up to the tyranny of the vices in which I had indulged as if they had a peculiar right to my obedience. But when by the virtue† of the regenerating water, the corruption of my former life was washed away, light from above poured in upon my purified and pardoned soul. The spirit of heaven was breathed into me, and a second nativity made me a new man. Soon then, in a most wonderful manner, things uncertain seemed to become

* Epist. ad Donat. Op. p. 2.

† Undæ genitalis auxilio.

established : those which had been kept secret were revealed : dark things shone with light. A new faculty was given ; what before seemed impossible could now be done ; so that I was now able to comprehend how that what was earthly, and carnal, and subject to sin, animated by the Holy Spirit, had become a child of God. You know as well as I, what that death of sin, and life of virtue, took from us and bestowed. You know it. I do not proclaim it, for to praise one's self is an odious boasting ; and yet in this case it would be gratitude ; for we ascribe nothing to the virtue of man, but to the grace of God, acknowledging that our former sin was the fruit of human wickedness, while that we now cease from sin, is the work of faith."

St. Cyprian was converted in the year 246, and the happy change thus produced in his mind he gratefully attributed to the preaching of the aged presbyter Cæcilius. No sooner had he received baptism, than he gave himself up to the earnest study of the Scriptures. Anxious to fulfil in all ways the commands of his Saviour, he sold his large possessions, sacrificing even his beautiful and favourite gardens, and distributed the money to the poor. His former companions beheld his conduct with scorn, and were not sparing of their ridicule. But Cyprian steadily persevered in his course. Every day convinced him more deeply of the value of that peace which he found in Christ ; and as his heart glowed with love and gratitude, so did he feel that it was only by a fervent holiness, and consistency with his profession, that he could truly glorify his Redeemer.

About two years had passed since his baptism, when a general desire was expressed by the Christians of Carthage to see him numbered among their clergy. He was ac-

cordingly admitted to the rank of presbyter, and the bishop of Carthage dying soon after, the most religious and influential party in the church resolved upon elevating him to the vacant dignity. This was done against his own repeated objections to accept so important an office. In vain he pleaded his inexperience ; in vain he shut himself up in his own chamber to avoid the entreaties of his friends ; they surrounded the house on every side, and no sooner did he reappear among them than they proceeded to the formal ceremony of his election.

But rich as Cyprian was in all the virtues which can adorn a bishop, a party was formed against him in the church over which he was set. At the head of this faction were five presbyters, Novatus, Donatus, and three others. Their conduct was grievous and unjust ; but Cyprian met them with brotherly affection, and sought by the exercise of patience and of generosity to deprive them of any cause of complaint. In this, however, he unhappily did not succeed, and the malice of his opponents was productive, in the course of time, of many serious evils to the church at large.

The charity which had distinguished him while still a layman, was no less characteristic of his conduct as a bishop. His love for the poor, his ardent sympathy with the distressed of every class, kept him continually engaged in works of benevolence. The dignity with which he performed his other duties was no less remarkable. His very countenance, it is said, shone bright with the rays of grace and holiness. The gravity of his demeanour was tempered with a serene cheerfulness ; and though he studiously avoided any appearance of pomp or splendour, he was utterly free from the affectation of severity or poverty.

Calculated as was his conduct towards the people to gain him general favour, his consideration for the clergy, his readiness to consult their opinions and wishes in whatever he did, was no less fitted to promote the peace and interests of the community.* No ordination took place without his inquiring their opinion of the candidate, or desiring their assent as confirmatory of his own judgment, to the selection which he had made. To the rule of the church he appealed with filial veneration. But the strictness of his principles was ever tempered by the natural gentleness of his heart, and the sentiment of evangelical charity.†

The influence which Cyprian exercised in Carthage became every day more conspicuous. A terrible pestilence having broken out, fresh opportunities were afforded for the employment of his fortitude and benevolence. Whilst all classes yielded themselves up to despair, and many perished for want of the simplest assistance, Cyprian sought the houses of the sick and dying, and by his timely aid, afforded the consolation of which both the one and the other stood in need. His exhortations moved others to exercise the Christian charity, which their alarm had, for the time, made them forget. The miseries attendant upon the pestilence were thus greatly lessened; and Cyprian was more venerated than ever by his people.

* Epis. xxxii. xxxiii. Op. p. 46.

† Writing to the presbyters and deacons, he says, speaking of Novatus and others, "I can return no answer to their inquiries, for from the commencement of my episcopacy, I resolved to do nothing of my own accord, without your advice, and the consent of the people. But when, by the grace of God, I return to you, we will consider these things together."—*Epis.* v. Op. p. 14.

A. D.
249. But these virtues, which so deservedly rendered him beloved by the Christians, only tended to increase the jealousy of the heathen and their rulers. The persecution commenced by Decius soon after his accession to the empire, furnished the enemies of Cyprian with an easy opportunity of satisfying their hatred. No sooner had the edict of the emperor been published in Carthage, than the populace assembled in the amphitheatre, and aloud demanded that Cyprian should be seized, and cast to the wild beasts.

But he had been forewarned of the coming storm. It is said, that an eminently holy member of his church was favoured with a vision shortly before the commencement of the persecution, whereby he was enabled to admonish his brethren of the approaching afflictions. The first use which they made of their knowledge, was to provide for the safety of Cyprian. They were too well aware of the injury which the church would suffer by the loss of such a man, not unanimously to desire his preservation. At first they found him utterly unwilling to listen to their entreaties. He had joyfully resigned everything on his conversion, that he might the better bear the cross of Christ; and he was now ready to be offered up a living sacrifice to the glory of his Redeemer!

Independent, indeed, of any especial warning which might be given him, Cyprian had been long prepared for the events which were now occurring. The state of the church affected him, as it did Origen and other such men, with sorrow and alarm. According to the melancholy account which he has given in his treatise concerning the lapsed, the bishops themselves, who ought to have been an example to others, deserted their divine employments to attend to worldly business; their

churches were left, their people forsaken, while they, wandering in distant provinces, only sought for gain or pleasure in the common pursuits of life. Of the clergy in general, it is said, that there was neither mercy in their works, nor discipline in their manners. The condition of the people corresponded to this decline of piety in their teachers. Marriages with the heathen were no longer shunned; in dress and behaviour there was now little difference between the Christian and the idolater. Fraud, and false swearing, and every other kind of sin, obliterated the traces of evangelical holiness; and it was everywhere seen that the law of God had ceased to be regarded with any degree of veneration or respect.*

When the persecution commenced, the effect was not such as a pious mind might have hoped. The decay of faith, the general corruption of manners had given birth to sins which the Lord was preparing to punish. But instead of the chastisement awakening the offenders to repentance; instead of its convincing them of the danger of trifling with the gospel, many of them hardened their hearts against the warning, and at the first signal of danger, hastened to the magistrate, and denied their faith.† Nor was this done under the actual pressure of suffering, but by a weak and voluntary anticipation of the threats of the magistrates. The wickedness of such conduct filled the mind of Cyprian with overwhelming sorrow. He looked daily for the infliction of divine judgment; and when it came, and the church was for a time desolated,

* *De Lapsis*: Cyprian. Op. p. 169.

† “*Maximus fratrum numerus fidem suam prodidit.*”—*De Lapsis*. Op. p. 170.

he felt how important it was to make such a use of the visitation as might stop, if possible, the rapid decline of Christian virtue.

It is not known where St. Cyprian spent his time during his absence from Carthage. The necessity of keeping his retreat a profound secret was evident to all his friends. He had scarcely left the city, when he was publicly proscribed, and an order was issued for the surrender of his goods, wherever found, to the magistrates of the place. One of his deacons, named Victor, and some other devoted followers, attended him in his retirement, and he employed his time in writing letters to the clergy of Carthage, and others, warning them against indulging that laxity of discipline which was now producing consequences so fatal to the honour of the gospel.*

The reports which were continually brought him, served to increase the anxiety excited in his mind by the first appearance of defection among his people. Crowds, he was informed, ran to the magistrates professing their readiness to offer sacrifice to the gods. When the judge expressed his readiness to defer their trial to the following day, they impatiently insisted upon being allowed at once to free themselves from the charge of being Christians. Parents even were seen bringing their children who had been baptized, and obliging them to perform some ceremony which would annul the sacred rite.

But though such was the unhappy weakness of many, some were found who manifested the constancy of their faith in the most trying season of the persecution. The prisons were crowded with confessors and martyrs; and the present life was regarded by these holy men as but

* Epist. Presbyt. et Diacon. Op. p. 16.

a light sacrifice to the glory of him who had redeemed them for eternity. Cyprian was affectionately solicitous respecting their state. In his letters to the presbyters and deacons, he urged them to take care that all their wants might be diligently attended to. But the caution which he gave them as to the mode of exercising this duty of brotherly love, affords an interesting view of the manner in which the Christian martyrs of those days were treated. Though guilty in the eyes of the heathen, of the highest crime against religion and the state ; and though condemned to suffer the most cruel tortures, they were not denied the consolation of frequent visits from those who were guilty of precisely the same offence ; but who, by some strange caprice of the magistrates, or from some other inexplicable cause, were still left at liberty. Cyprian saw the necessity of great caution, lest this moderation, so favourable in many respects to his people, should be destroyed by any inconsiderate display of zeal or devotion. "If the brethren," he said, "be desirous, from a feeling of affection to visit the confessors, whom Divine Providence has deemed worthy of such a glorious beginning, let them do it cautiously, and not altogether, in a crowd. For should there be any appearance of confusion, offence might be taken, and then admission would, for the future, be denied. Thus, by desiring too much, we should lose all. Be careful, therefore, and act with forbearance, that you may act safely. Let the presbyters who perform the service of offering there with the confessors take different deacons alternately, since the change of persons assembling, from time to time, will diminish suspicion. Be gentle and humble in all things, as becometh the servants of God. Yield to the necessity of

the times ; consult quiet, and look to the condition of the people."*

A remarkable practice arose from the reverence in which martyrs and confessors were held by the church at large. Their sufferings raised them to a degree of spiritual dignity, which gave authority to every wish or sentiment they expressed. Hence it gradually became the custom for those who had failed to exercise a similar degree of fortitude under persecution, to seek, when repenting of their sin, the aid of confessors and martyrs to procure their restoration to the communion of the church. In many instances, the tenderness of these holy, sanctified, and heroic men for the frailty of their less advanced brethren, exhibited itself in so wise and sedate a manner, that it would have been an offence to Christian charity to reject the prayers which were supported by their intercessions.

But like so many other practices which, reasonable at first, have degenerated into mere instruments of corruption, the custom of restoring the lapsed at the request of a martyr or confessor, was soon found to be injurious to the right order or discipline of the church. Armed with a little scroll, penned by the martyr in his dungeon, the miserable denier of his Lord would present himself to the congregation which he had disgraced, and desire his immediate readmission to the state from which he had fallen.† When this grew into a daily practice, fortitude, devotion, and the necessity of those various exercises whereby faith was to be strengthened, became less and

* Epist. iv. Op. 11.

† "Audio enim quibusdam sic libellos fieri ut dicatur; Communice ille cum suis."—*Epist. x. Op. p. 24.*

less regarded. Professors of the gospel, who would probably sooner have lost their lives than given up for ever the hope of salvation by Christ, could not endure the sight of the amphitheatre or the stake, when they recollected that though they did offer incense, the intercession of some friendly martyr might obtain for them the pardon of the church.

Cyprian saw, with his usual penetration, that this was one of the many causes to which the present decline of discipline might be attributed. He wrote therefore to the martyrs and confessors themselves on the subject; and while declaring his own profound admiration of their Christian graces, entreated them not to promote a custom which tended so greatly to the injury of genuine piety and discipline. Some of the presbyters, it appears, had favoured the abuses of which he complains. Through their application to the martyrs, many of the lapsed had received a form of petition which ought to have been presented to the authorities of the church, but which had been perverted from its proper use, and so employed as to enable the offenders to receive the Lord's supper without any solemn act of penitence, or imposition of hands in sign of absolution. "I beseech you then," says Cyprian, addressing the martyrs, "and with the most earnest entreaties, that, being mindful of the gospel, and considering how the martyrs who have preceded you acted in these matters, and how careful they were in all things, you also, as friends of the Lord, may anxiously and cautiously weigh the requests of those who seek your aid."

But it was not at Carthage only that the terrors of persecution were experienced. Rome suffered the loss of its venerable bishop Fabian.* Alexander, also, bishop of Jeru-

* Eusebius, lib. vi. c. 39.

saalem, was apprehended, and carried before the tribunal of the magistrate. Forty years before, his faith and constancy had been put to the proof under the persecution then raging. He was now in extreme old age ; but his spirit had lost none of its vigour or resolution. The name of Christ gave power to his words ; and the infirmities of his body rendered the constancy of his mind more dignified and illustrious. Being cast into prison at Cæsarea, and fettered with heavy irons, his little natural strength soon sunk under the inflictions which he suffered ; and his death, like that of Origen, his faithful and beloved friend, was lamented by the Christians as that of one of God's most devoted servants.

The same example of fortitude was not set by all the bishops of these times. Smyrna, which had witnessed the glorious confession and martyrdom of Polycarp, had now the affliction to behold a bishop apostatizing from the faith. This was the wretched Eudemon, who, miserable himself, had the additional guilt of leading others, by his example, to commit the same treachery against the gospel.

But while the faithful of Smyrna, and the neighbouring provinces, were filled with sorrow at the conduct of Eudemon, they were reassured by the noble devotion of the presbyter, Pionius. It was on the eve of the day when the martyrdom of Polycarp was celebrated in the church, that Pionius, and his two friends, Sabina and Asclepiades, were keeping a solemn fast and watch as preparatory to the services of the following day. During the silence of the night, Pionius, it is said, saw a vision which convinced him that he would be apprehended the next morning. That he might convince the persecutors when they should arrive, that they had not been unexpected,

he put a chain about his neck, and persuading his companions to do the same, awaited in tranquillity the dawn of day. To strengthen their resolves they engaged in earnest prayer, and then partook of the blessed sacrament.

At length, the captain of the heathen temple, attended by several of the city officers, arrived as had been expected. On seeing Pionius, he inquired, if he had heard the commands of the emperor, respecting the sacrifices to the gods ? “ We know, indeed, of commandments,” replied Pionius, “ but they are the commandments of the God of heaven.”

Having been dragged to the temple, violence of every kind was employed to compel the confessors to offer sacrifice. The apostate bishop was standing silent by the altar, while Pionius had to endure the savage threats of some, and the rude questioning of others, among the crowd of magistrates and their attendants. After some time, he was placed before the tribunal of the proconsul, and condemned to the flames. Arrived at the stake, he thanked God for having preserved him in purity, and then quietly laid himself on the pile. The soldier appointed to nail his hands and feet, paused before commencing his work, and exhorted him to retract while there was yet time. Instead of assenting to this advice, the martyr breathed a sigh, and exclaimed, “ I am in haste, Lord, to rise again ?” A Marcionite, named Metrodorus, was brought to the stake at the same time. They were both placed upright with their faces towards the east. Huge quantities of wood were then piled around them. Pionius closed his eyes, and the multitude supposed him to be already dead. But the preparations being completed, he looked steadily at the rising flames ; and calmly said, “ Amen !” Then commending his soul to God, he expired as if falling asleep.

The church at Neocæsarea experienced its due share

of the visitation. Many of the faithful were put to cruel tortures ; and still more would have perished but for the timely caution of Gregory Thaumaturgus. By his advice, on the first breaking out of the persecution, those who were most obnoxious to the heathen fled from their homes, and concealed themselves in the neighbouring villages. Knowing how ready his enemies would be to sacrifice him, in the first instance, to their vengeance, he sought shelter in a lonely cavern, surrounded by woods and mountains. His only attendant in this solitude was the heathen priest in whose temple he had passed the night on his journey to Neocæsarea. The priest was now a true convert to the gospel ; and he gladly shared with Gregory the perils attending his new profession.

It seemed by a miracle only that these faithful companions escaped the pursuit of the enemy. They were reserved for further labours. But it was not so with Alexander, the charcoal-burner. The city of Comana, of which he was bishop, was exposed to the utmost violence of the persecution ; and he who had been in so remarkable a way exalted in the church, readily stood forward to glorify by his sufferings the power of its gifts and doctrines. With similar resolution the aged Babylas, bishop of Antioch, proclaimed his love of Christ, and died in prison, laden with irons, which he prayed might still be left on him in the grave.

At Alexandria the same scenes were witnessed as at Carthage.* Crowds of terrified creatures, who had professed themselves Christians, rushed frantically to the tribunals of the magistrates, and the altars of the heathen temples. With loud voices, they declared their readiness

* Eusebius, lib. vi. c. 41.

to sacrifice to the gods, or to prove, by any other means, that they rejected Christ. Some, on the other hand, had sufficient fortitude to resist the sudden feeling of terror, persevered in their confession till they were cast into prison. Having been there a few days, their resolution failed, and before they could again be brought before the tribunal, they declared their readiness to sacrifice. Others, again, had sufficient strength to bear the first infliction of torture, but when it was about to be repeated, they shrunk, horror-stricken, from the remembered agony, and supplicated the heathen to grant them mercy on his own terms.

But it was not thus with all. Amid the general defection, some were found whose fortitude equalled that of believers in the earlier times, and when Christian virtue was supported in the hour of suffering by so much more clear an apprehension of the true character of the gospel. Both men and women were seen, who patiently endured all the successive degrees of torture to which the persecutors could expose them—the gloomy prison, the heavy fetters, the rack, and the flames. Nor was the faithfulness of the few without its influence on the state of the church, from which they were taken. Their constancy pierced to the heart those who had failed in the season of trial. It taught them to consider what had led to their fall; how they could have been surprised into so fatal an act of ingratitude towards their God and Saviour; and when they discovered that the looseness of their general conduct, their negligence as to the employment of the means of grace, and their too frequent intercourse with the world, might account for their utter want of strength in the hour of peril, they were taught thereby to adopt a sterner rule for the future, and to acknowledge the rea-

sonableness and value of that wholesome discipline, which the church had, at the first, exercised in the government of its children,

No one could have laboured more strenuously than Cyprian in endeavouring to impress this important lesson on the minds of Christians. Warning all the members of his church against wishing offenders to be restored to communion without due proofs of their sincerity, "I grieve," he says, "for those, our brethren, who have fallen. I sympathize with them. Their wounds have inflicted no less pain on me than on themselves. Divine mercy is powerful, indeed, to heal those wounds; but we must do nothing in haste or incautiously, lest while we rashly seek peace, the wrath of God may be provoked again, and more terribly than before." So, also: "let no one pluck the unripe apple. No wise man will trust a ship to the sea, till the injuries it has suffered from the stormy waves have been repaired. The torn garment is not worn again till the rent has been sown up. Let our advice, then, be patiently received. Await our return, that when, by the mercy of God, we are with you, many of our fellow bishops being called together, we may be able to examine the letters of the blessed martyrs, and the wishes of the petitioners, according to the discipline of the Lord, and in the presence of the confessors."*

In another epistle, he urges the presbyters and deacons to remind the offenders, who impatiently sought reconciliation, whence they were fallen; and then to show them the necessity of true repentance. "And he repents," he adds, "who mildly and patiently obeys the divine precepts, and who yielding himself to the instruction of God's ministers, obtains, by his obedience and his just

* Epist. xi. *Fratribus in Plebe* p. 24.

works, the mercy of the Lord." If any one should prove sick and infirm, liberty was to be given him to make use of the martyr's recommendation, should he have received such a testimonial in his favour. But in other cases, the penitent was to wait till the proper time should arrive for his being publicly readmitted to the peace of the church; "a regulation," says Cyprian, "without which, modesty, discipline, salvation itself, would be endangered for us all." In a letter to the Roman clergy, he again complains of the rashness of some of the presbyters of his church. Their proceedings filled him with anxiety, and he found himself constrained to exercise his authority for the suppression of their irregularities. "We have done all in our power," he adds, "to compose the minds of the people, and so to instruct them in their duty, that ecclesiastical discipline may be preserved."*

When the persecution had continued for about a year, its violence was somewhat diminished; and St. Cyprian trusted that he might return to Carthage in safety. But while making preparations for his journey, intelligence[†] reached him that a party of factious presbyters had been formed, whose designs would rather be aided than suppressed by his presence among them. At the head of the faction were Novatus and Felicissimus, both of them infamous for the violence of their temper and the immorality of their lives. The former was a presbyter, and the latter had been admitted to the order of deacon by a pretended ordination, which Novatus had himself undertaken to perform.† It was easy for these men to persuade the lapsed, whom Cyprian refused to acknowledge as penitents till they had given proof of their sincerity, that they had a right to more indulgent treatment. The

* Epis. xiii. Op. p. 26.

† Epis. xlix. Op. p. 63.

presbyters, who originally opposed the election of Cyprian to the bishopric, were equally ready to join any party which offered them the means of gratifying their resentment. Thus the church of Carthage was threatened with a dangerous schism ; and a slight failure, either in firmness or discretion on the part of the bishop, might have precipitated and confirmed the evil. Calling to his aid some of the most respected of the neighbouring clergy, he formally excommunicated the authors of the present disturbances.

The period at length arrived, when Cyprian might safely return to Carthage. His first object was to re-establish the peace and discipline of his church on a sure foundation. For this purpose he assembled a council, consisting of numerous bishops distinguished for their piety and learning. A careful inquiry was instituted in this assembly into the conduct of Novatus and the other presbyters, who stood at the head of the schism. The examination ended in the clearest proof of their guilt, and the council hesitated not to confirm the judgment which Cyprian himself had passed.

Novatus, in the mean time, had taken up his abode at Rome. There he met with a party, from which he trusted to derive the advantages which he now dare scarcely hope to enjoy at Carthage. After the martyrdom of Fabian, the church of Rome was too harassed by persecution to allow of its clergy to proceed at once to the election of a new bishop. • Thus the episcopal chair remained vacant for near two years; at the end of which period, Cornelius was raised to the dignity by the legitimate choice of his brother presbyters. But another candidate had laid claim to the office. This was Novatian, a man of proud and stern temper, who finding

himself disappointed in his wishes,* resolved to satisfy his ambition by the only way which now seemed open to him, that is, by forming a sect, and placing himself at its head.

Cyprian and his associates acted with due caution in respect to these affairs. It was not till they had sent two of their brethren to Rome to learn the actual state of the dispute, and the character of the several parties, that they would venture to acknowledge Cornelius as bishop. The answer which they received to their inquiries convinced them of the turbulence of Novatian. He had created a schism in the church, under pretence of defending its purity, while the whole of his conduct tended to prove that he had only in view the gratification of his own resentment. Through the instrumentality of three bishops from the obscurest parts of Italy, and whose ignorance and poverty were greater than usual, he obtained a species of consecration, and straightway called himself bishop of Rome. His main doctrine was, that those who had once fallen into deadly sin, ought never to be restored to communion with the church. This opinion was in harmony with his general sentiments. He had long professed the philosophy of the Stoics; and had it not been for the schism which he created, his stern views on the subject of the lapsed might only have been regarded as somewhat too exalted and severe. His own moral character, moreover, was stained by none of the odious vices which dis-

* This is the general account of Novatian's conduct. Mosheim, however, expresses considerable doubt at the charge brought against him, respecting the bishopric. He considers, that the natural pride and stoical sternness of his temper are sufficient to explain his conduct in the establishment of a sect distinguished for its excessive severity. *De Rebus Christ. ante Constant. Sæculum. iii.*

graced that of Novatus. . But he lost the credit due to his own purity by the common cause which he made with men of so different a disposition. His schism rapidly increased ; and with success, he became more and more virulent. Many of those who had triumphed over the terrors of the persecution joined his party, because they considered his sentiments as giving peculiar honour to their fortitude and perseverance. Others followed the same course, from the notion that by associating with men of such character, some portion of courage might be transfused into their own hearts. In this way the party of Novatian soon acquired a degree of strength which enabled it to resist, for many years, the whole power of opposing churches.

A. D.
253. In a second council, held at Carthage, forty-two bishops were present. That which was assembled a year before, had determined that the lapsed should only receive absolution when in danger of death. But in this a milder decree was passed ; and the penitents who had spent the time since their fall in weeping, and in praying for the Divine forgiveness, were to be admitted to communion immediately on their application. This indulgence, it is said, was the more readily granted from the daily apprehension of another persecution. No privilege in those times was considered so great as that of being permitted to partake of the Eucharist. To the believer, that blessed sacrament was a source of strength and courage ; and those who were most anxious that the followers of Christ should be able to endure the conflict, were equally solicitous to see them refreshed in soul and spirit by partaking of the heavenly banquet.

The persecution came, as had been foreseen. Decius was scarcely dead, when his sons, Gallus and Volusian,

revived the barbarities* of their father, trusting by the destruction of the Christians to avert the wrath of the gods, the origin, as they believed, of the pestilence, which was now ravaging every quarter of the empire. Cyprian employed himself unceasingly in the various offices of Christian charity during the calamitous visitation. His name was frequently pronounced in the Circus, and his blood demanded, as an acceptable oblation to the divinities. But the terror and confusion which reigned on all sides, served as a providential shelter to the holy man. He was still spared to his people ; and an interval of repose being enjoyed at the commencement of the reign of Valerian, he resumed his labours for the correction of disorders, and the firmer establishment of discipline. It was in one of the councils held at this period, that the question was first formally moved respecting the validity of baptism conferred by heretics. Cyprian entertained the strongest opinions respecting the unity of the church. "We have one church," he says, writing to Cornelius, "a united mind—a concord indivisible."† In another letter, addressed to some Roman confessors who had fallen into the error of Novatian, he says, "I am overwhelmed with grief and anxiety; my breast is torn with anguish, at learning that you have consented to the creation of another bishop, and this against ecclesiastical order; against the evangelical law; against the unity of Catholic institution; allowing—what cannot be just or lawful—another church to be formed; the members of Christ to be rent asunder; the one soul and the one body of the Lord's flock to be torn by angry rivalry."‡ So also, and still more strongly, "Whosoever he is, and whatsoever he may be, he is not a Christian, who is not

* Epist. lviii. Op. p. 91.

† Epist. xlv. Op. p. 58.

in the church of Christ. Let him boast of his philosophy; let him proclaim his eloquence in haughty words, he who has retained neither brotherly charity nor ecclesiastical unity, has lost whatsoever he once possessed.”* And further: “The church is one from Christ, existing through all the world, divided into many members. And the episcopate is also one, diffused through an harmonious variety of many bishops.” And hence, he says, even had Novatian been really a bishop, he would have ceased to be so as soon as he began to favour strife and dissension: “For he who preserves neither the unity of the spirit nor the bond of peace, and who separates himself from the church, and from the college of presbyters, can have neither the power nor the honour of a bishop, seeing that he has refused to uphold either the unity or the peace of the episcopate.”†

Such being the views of Cyprian respecting the unity of the church, and the necessity of communion as a condition of salvation, it is easy to understand how he arrived at the conclusion, that the baptism of heretics can produce no benefit to the soul. In one of his epistles on this subject, he argues, that as a heretic cannot bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit, so neither can he baptize.‡ In another letter on the same subject, he says, “I know not by what presumption some of our colleagues are inspired, when they suppose, that those who have been baptized by heretics when they come to us ought not to be rebaptized. The reason which they advance is, that there is one baptism, and that this one is in the Catholic

* “Ad Antonianum de Cornelio et Novatiano.” *Epist.* lii. p. 73.

† *Epist.* lii. p. 73.

‡ “Ad Januarium et Cæteros Episcopos Numidas, de Baptizandis Hæreticis.” *Op.* p. 117.

church ; and this church being one, there can be no baptism out of the church. For since it is impossible that there should be two baptisms, if heretics do indeed baptize, they have baptism. Whence they who of their own authority grant them this privilege, yield to them, and consent, that the enemies and adversaries of Christ seem to possess the power of washing, and purifying, and sanctifying a man. But we, on the other hand, say, that they who come from the heretics, are not *rebaptized* by us, but baptized. For assuredly they can receive nothing where nothing exists ; but they come to us that they may receive somewhat here, where grace and truth exist in their fulness, because grace and truth are one. Some, indeed, of our colleagues wish rather to give honour to the heretics than to assent to us. And while from the assertion of one baptism, they are unwilling to baptize those who come to them, so also they either make two baptisms, admitting as they do the baptism of heretics ; or, which is a more grievous error, they prefer the base and profane dipping of the heretics to the true and only and legitimate baptism of the catholic church."

In answer to the remark, that, in the primitive church those who had fallen into heresy, but who returned to the profession of the true faith, were not re-baptized, St. Cyprian observes—" And the same custom is still observed among us. If it appears that they who have gone from us to the heretics were originally baptized by us, then, if, their sin being acknowledged and their error rejected, they come back to the truth and their mother, the church, we deem imposition of hands unto repentance sufficient, that thus the pastor may receive the sheep which was lost again into the fold. But if he who comes from the heretics was not originally baptized in the church, but comes

altogether as one strange and profane, then he must be baptized that he may become one of the sheep, for there is one water in the church which makes the sheep. And, therefore, because there can be nothing common to falsehood and to truth; to darkness and light; to death and immortality; to antichrist and Christ, we ought in all things to hold the unity of the catholic church, nor to yield to the enemy in any point of faith and verity.”*

The opinion thus anxiously advocated by St. Cyprian, was debated in, and finally confirmed by, a council, consisting of eighty-seven bishops, from the provinces of Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania, with a corresponding number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen. At the opening of this council, Cyprian addressed his brethren as one who was only desirous of promoting the truth, and the interests of the gospel, according to the rule of Christian charity. “Let each of us freely deliver his sentiments,” he said: “judging no one, nor attempting to separate him from communion, if he think differently to ourselves. For none of us has constituted himself a bishop of bishops; or wishes to compel his colleague, by tyrannically alarming him, to the sacrifice of his opinion.”†

None of the early councils exercised a more important influence on the state of opinion in the church than this. The report of its proceedings still exists, in the form of brief sentences, containing the substance of the speeches delivered by the several bishops. If we may trust to this report, a remarkable union of sentiment prevailed in the large assembly convened to debate the question, which in

* Page 119.

† Concilium Carthaginiense de Baptizandis Hæreticis.—Cyprian. Op. p. 282.

another portion of the catholic church was viewed in so different a light. Some of the arguments advanced admitted of being compressed into a very narrow compass, but they show sufficiently well the character of the whole debate. Thus one of the speakers says—"Either nothing is lawful to heretics, or all is lawful. If they can baptize, they can give the Holy Spirit; but if they cannot give the Holy Spirit, because they themselves have not the Holy Spirit, neither can they baptize spiritually. Wherefore we conclude that heretics ought to be baptized."

Again: "If when the blind lead the blind, they both fall into the ditch, so, when the heretic baptizes the heretic, they both fall into death. Hence, the heretic ought to be baptized and justified, lest he who has life should communicate with the dead." Another asks—"Are heretics Christians, or are they not? If they be Christians, why are they not in the church of God? If they be not, how can they make Christians? Or what is the meaning of our Lord's words, 'He who is not with me is against me, and he who gathereth not with me scattereth?' Whence it appears, that upon the strange children, and offspring of antichrist, the Holy Spirit cannot descend by imposition of hands, and, therefore, it is manifest that heretics have not baptism." "I wonder," said another speaker, "that when all confess that baptism is one, they do not all understand the unity of the same baptism. For the church and heresy are two and diverse. If the heretics have baptism, we have it not. If we have it, the heretics cannot have it. But there is no doubt that the church, which alone possesses the grace and truth of Christ, alone possesses baptism."

But large as was the assembly of bishops on this occasion, and united as they were in sentiment, the con-

clusion at which they arrived was regarded at Rome in the light of an innovation on the rule and doctrine of the church. Stephen, the present bishop of that see, for some cause not sufficiently explained, treated the representatives of the African Council, who were bishops themselves, with haughtiness and insult. They had undertaken a long and painful journey, at the request of Cyprian, for the purpose of formally laying before him the report of what had occurred. He would hear nothing from their lips; and even issued an order prohibiting the members of his church from affording them the common rights of hospitality. In the same spirit he wrote to Cyprian himself, from one of whose letters we learn the principal contents of his remarkable epistle. Cyprian, though doubtless deeply affected at the unbrotherly conduct of his fellow bishop, bore the insult with patience and dignity. In answer to his friend, who had requested a sight of the letter, he says,* "I have sent you a copy according to your wish, of the reply which our brother Stephen has given to my letters. The more you read this, the more you will discover his error, in endeavouring to support the cause of heretics against Christians, and against the church of God. For among other things, either boastful or not pertaining to the matter in dispute, or involving contradictions, which unwisely and thoughtlessly he has written, there is this, 'If any one, therefore, come to us from any heresy whatsoever, let there be no innovation; but according to what tradition teaches, let him receive imposition of hands unto repentance. For when heretics pass from one to the other, they do not baptize,

* Ad Pompeium Contra Epistolam Stephani. Epist. lxxiv. Op. p. 129.

but communicate only.' Thus he has forbidden him who has forsaken a heresy, whatsoever it may be to be baptized in the church ; that is, he has decided, that the baptisms of all heretics are just and legitimate. And since each heresy has its baptism, and its sins, he, communicating with the baptism of all, heaps up in his own bosom the collected guilt of all. And he commands that nothing be introduced except what is supported by tradition ; as if he was guilty of innovation, who preserves unity and vindicates for the church its one baptism ; and not he rather, who, forgetting unity, defends the falsehoods and the contaminations of a profane dipping. ' Let nothing be introduced which has not been handed down.' Whence is that tradition ? Has it descended from the authority of the Lord, and the gospel ? Has it come down from the commands of the apostles, and their epistles ? For that those things ought to be done which are written, the Lord testifies when he speaks to Joshua, saying, ' the book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate upon it day and night ; that thou mayst observe to do all the things which are written therein.' So also our Lord sending forth his apostles directs them to baptize and teach all nations, that they may observe all things whatsoever he has commanded them."

The importance of this appeal from unsupported tradition to the authority of Scripture, will be apparent to most readers ; and it is worthy of observation that, even in the strongest assertions of St. Cyprian, and his colleagues, the reference is almost invariably made, not to opinion, but to some argument which owes its whole strength to Scripture. True it is, the testimony of the divine word is often introduced by a species of interpretation far from critical or exact ; but the appeal is to

Scripture ; and it proves, that he who made it did not suppose that his notions or arguments would deserve respect, unless they could be established by the word of God.

Thus St. Cyprian continues : “ If, therefore, it be commanded in the gospel ; if it be contained in the Epistles, or in the Acts of the Apostles, that those who have forsaken a heresy of any kind whatsoever, should not be baptized, but should receive nothing more than imposition of hands unto repentance, then let this divine and holy tradition be observed. But heretics are everywhere spoken of as nothing else than adversaries and antichrists. If they are to be avoided ; and are pronounced to be perverse, and condemned even of themselves, how is it that they ought not to be condemned of us ? ”

Having again alluded to the error and obstinacy of Stephen, he says, that ‘ schism and heresy were daily on the increase, and that it could not be otherwise while authority and stability were given them by the advocacy of those who ought to be their enemies : while their baptism was defended ; while faith, while truth was betrayed ; while that which was carried on against the church without, was vindicated within the very church itself.’ And referring again to the authority of Scripture, he says, “ If we go back to the head and origin of divine tradition human error will give way. The real character of heavenly mysteries being viewed, whatsoever now lies hid in clouds and darkness will shine forth in the light of truth. If the channel through which water is wont to flow readily and copiously, becomes suddenly dry, do we not immediately examine the spring to discover why the stream has failed ? Whether it be from the drying of the veins, or from the exhaustion of the spring itself ? Or whether the fountain

being still clear and full, the water has been stopped in its course? Or if the supply has been cut off by some interruption in the conduit, that being repaired, the water, even as it flows purely and copiously from the fountain, is again collected for the use and comfort of the city. And this is what the priests of God, those who keep the divine oracles, ought to do ; that is, if truth be weak and hesitating, we should revert to its original in the Lord and in the gospel, and to the apostolic tradition. If we do this, the motive of our conduct will begin there where order and truth themselves begin. For it has been handed down to us, that there is one God, and one Christ, and one hope, and one faith, and one church ; and that there is one baptism, to be had in the church alone ; from which unity whosoever separates himself he must necessarily be numbered with heretics, by defending whom against the church, he infringes the mystery of divine tradition.”*

A. D. 257. It was thus that St. Cyprian defended his views against the tyrannous effort of the bishop of Rome to suppress them by a mere act of his own. Cyprian continued to uphold the doctrine which he deemed so essential to the integrity of the church to the end of his days. His tranquillity was disturbed not only by controversy, but by the frequent efforts of those who feared his zeal, and hated his piety, to deprive him of his dignity. He cared little, however, for any attack which did not tend to injure the cause of truth and holiness. On the recommencement of persecution under the emperor Valerian, he was apprehended, and carried before the proconsul of Africa. In answer to the questions addressed to him, he unhesitatingly replied, that he was a Christian

* Epist. lxxiv. Op. p. 132.

and a bishop; that he knew no other gods but the one true God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is. "This," he said, "is the Cod whom we serve, and to whom we pray day and night, for ourselves and for all men, and for the prosperity of the emperor." The proconsul said, "Do you persevere in this determination?" Cyprian replied—"A good resolution, founded on the knowledge of God, ought not to be changed." "Are you prepared, then," continued the judge, "to go into exile?" An answer was immediately given in the affirmative. But when the proconsul added, that he was ordered to apprehend presbyters as well as bishops, and therefore desired to know where they might be found, Cyprian replied, that the very laws discouraged informers, and that it was assuredly not for him to betray his friends. "Neither," he added, "does the discipline of our church permit any one to offer himself to the magistrate; but if you seek our brethren you will find them."

The place chosen for Cyprian's banishment was the little city of Corubum, on the sea-coast, opposite the island of Sicily. His virtues and gentle demeanour contributed to disarm even the heathen inhabitants of their prejudices against a Christian bishop. There were also many believers in the neighbourhood. Their continual and fond attention amply supplied the few wants which he had; and the general tranquillity of the place, its pure air and lovely scenery, filled the devout heart of Cyprian with a deep feeling of serenity and thankfulness.

It might be considered, indeed, that the repose which he thus enjoyed was granted him that his soul might collect its strength for the trial which awaited it; that it might free itself from the load of uneasy impressions left on it by strife and controversy; and rise into that pure

region of heavenly contemplation where it might learn to overcome still more entirely earthly fears and dispositions.

Cyprian's condition, in these respects, was one of great happiness, and especially when compared with that of many of his brethren. No fewer than nine bishops of the African church were apprehended during his exile, and condemned to the mines. Numerous presbyters, many pious laymen, and even women and children were doomed to the same punishment.*

The violence of the persecution for a time declined, and Cyprian obtained leave to return to Carthage. But it was not with the expectation of safety or repose that he sought his home. He knew that the present quiet was but a lull in the storm, and that the tempest would soon break forth again with increased fury. It was only that he might spend some brief period of holy converse with his clergy and people that he took advantage of the liberty granted him. Retiring, therefore, to a villa in the neighbourhood of the city, he diligently employed his time in teaching those important lessons of duty, charity, and order which he had ever insisted upon as so necessary to the safety, or the ministerial efficiency, of the church. He had not been long thus engaged when reports were brought from day to day that the emperor Valerian had renewed the persecution with greater violence than before; that Sextus, bishop of Rome, had already fallen a victim to the decrees of the tyrant; and that many other excellent men, distinguished for their position in the state, as

* Cyprian's own letter to some of the confessors, labouring in the mines, acquaints us with these circumstances.—Epis. lxxvii. Op. p. 155.

well as for piety and acquirements, had been sacrificed at the same time.*

St. Cyprian had prepared himself for this intelligence. It created, therefore, neither surprise nor alarm in his soul. More anxious for others than for himself, he took the best measures in his power to strengthen his brethren, the bishops and clergy of the neighbouring districts, against the approaching trial. "I request you," he says, writing to Successus, "to make the things which have happened known to our colleagues, so that the brethren may everywhere be fortified by their exhortations, and prepared for the spiritual conflict. And that, on our part, we may think less of death than of immortality; and with a full faith and unshaken courage, may rather rejoice in dedicating ourselves to the Lord, than tremble in this act of confession; in which the soldiers of God and of Christ know, that instead of perishing, they are crowned."†

The proconsul was now at Utica; and information reached St. Cyprian that officers had been dispatched for the purpose of immediately apprehending him, and conveying him to that city. This intelligence greatly distressed him—not because he shrunk from the martyrdom for which he had been so long prepared, but because he earnestly desired to shed his blood where his own church and people might be witnesses to his faithfulness. Some of his dearest friends had the same feeling which he had; and at their advice he left his villa, and concealed himself in a remoter spot, resolving to continue there till the proconsul should take up his residence in Carthage.‡

* "Senatores verò et viri egregii, et equites Romani, dignitate amissa, etiam bonis spoliuntur, et si ademptis facultatibus Christiani, esse perseveraverint, capite quoque multentur."—*Epis. lxxxii. Op. p. 160.*

† *Ib.*

‡ *Epis. lxxxiii. Op. p. 161.*

In his letter to the clergy and people on this subject, he says, "It is proper that a bishop should confess the Lord in that city in which he presides over the church of the Lord, and that all the people should be made luminous by this confession of their ruler thus present among them. For whatsoever the bishop says during that confession he speaks, God inspiring him, by the mouth of all. The honour of our glorious church then will be injured if I should make my confession at Utica, being the bishop of another church, and should thence depart a martyr to the Lord. For both on my own account and on yours, I seek, by continual prayer, by vows and supplications, to be permitted to offer my confession among you, my people."

Assigning this as the reason of his leaving Carthage, he continues :—"Do you therefore, dearest brethren, cultivate peace and quiet for the sake of that discipline which you have always received from the commandments of the Lord, and have ever diligently learnt according to my teaching. Let not any of you excite a tumult among the brethren, or of his own accord offer himself to the Gentiles. Apprehended and delivered up, he ought indeed to speak; for the Lord in that hour will speak in us, seeing that he has desired us *to confess* rather than *to profess*."

When St. Cyprian learnt that the proconsul had left Utica for Carthage, he lost no time in returning to his villa. He knew that his hours were numbered, and awaited tranquilly the appearance of the officers of the magistrates at the gates of his residence. They came as he had expected, but not as hoping to secure their prisoner with so little difficulty. It astonished them to find him prepared to attend their summons; nor were the cheerfulness and urbanity with which he bore himself

towards them, as they conducted him to the proconsul, less calculated to fill them with respect and admiration.

A vast crowd, it is said, was soon collected on its being made known that Cyprian had been apprehended. Numbers of his people watched throughout the night in the street opposite the house where he was lodged. Many of the heathen, who venerated him for his charity and other exalted virtues, mingled with the Christians, and did not conceal their sorrow that so good and great a man was about to perish.

On the following morning the proconsul, ascending the tribunal, directed Cyprian to be brought before him. After the ordinary questions and answers, sentence was passed upon the confessor, and he was immediately led to the place appointed for his execution. To the officer by whom he was to be beheaded he presented a small sum of gold, and then proceeded to bandage his own eyes, and to bind his hands. Finding that he could not do this without difficulty, one of his attendant priests, and a deacon, came to his assistance. Several of the people, in the meantime, spread their handkerchiefs around the block to catch the blood of the martyr, who died by a single stroke of the axe.

The personal character of St. Cyprian, and the general tone of his sentiments, may be sufficiently understood from what has been already said. His views of church unity and authority—of baptism, and its connexion with every other divine mystery, are conspicuously set forth in the few quotations which we have made from his writings. The other great sacrament of the gospel, that of the Eucharist or Communion, is described by him as ‘a shield, as arms,’ to those who are engaged in the Christian warfare. “Let us fortify them,” he says, “with the protection of

the blood and body of Christ; and since the Eucharist is ordained for this, that it may be a defence to those who receive it, let us arm all those, whose safety we so earnestly desire, with the strength of the Lord's sufficiency. For how can we teach and exhort them to pour out their own blood in confessing the name of Christ, if we deny to them, when about to enter into the conflict, the blood of Christ? Or how can we make them fit for the cup of martyrdom, if we do not before admit them, by the law of communication, to drink in the church the cup of the Lord?"*

In another place, speaking of the sentence in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," he says—"Christ is the bread of life; and this bread is not the bread of all, but is peculiarly our bread; and as we say, 'Our Father,' because he is the Father of those who are wise and believe; so also do we call it our bread, because Christ is our bread—the bread of us—that is, who touch his body. But we ask that this bread may be daily given us, lest we who are in Christ, and receive the Eucharist daily, as the food of salvation, being prohibited therefrom by the intervention of some grievous sin, should be separated from the body of Christ. For he himself declares and admonishes, 'I am the bread of life, which came down from heaven. If any one eat of my bread, he shall live for ever. But the bread which I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world.' When, therefore, he says, that if any one eat of his bread, he shall live for ever, how manifest is it, that they live who touch his body, and receive the Eucharist by the right of communication. So also ought we to fear and pray, lest he who partakes not of it should be

* Epist. liv. Op. p. 76.

separated from the body of Christ—should remain far from salvation. For he himself warns us and says, ‘Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye shall have no life in you.’ And, therefore, we pray that our daily bread, that is, Christ, may be daily given us; that we who dwell and live in Christ may never recede from his sanctification and his body.”*

The period during which St. Cyprian lived was fruitful in events. It formed the commencement of that season of developments in which the principles of the church manifested their power in its assertion of authority; in its definite views on the subject of communion, and on the vast importance of the sacraments, not only as connected with the spiritual life of the believer, but as the most powerful of instruments, and as involving the noblest of sanctions, in every act which the church can be called upon to perform in reference to its members.

So, too, was it at this time, that the sentiment had its birth which led immediately to the establishment of the Ascetic and Monastic systems. In the earlier ages of the gospel there was but the alternative of the kingdom of heaven, with all its toils and persecutions, or the world, lying in darkness. He who wished to escape from the condemnation of the wicked, might find on one narrow path the way to a home and a sanctuary; but when he entered it, he was to regard it as a beleaguered fortress, in the defence of which he was himself to take a part. When the cross was assumed, it became to him who bore it, not an emblem of self-denial merely, but a mighty weapon with which to assail the powers of evil, as they ruled and struggled in the world. It was not for

* De Oratione Dominica. Op. p. 192.

himself only that the penitent rejoiced in having embraced the gospel, and obeyed its injunctions, but for those other souls which, by the bland influence of his example and his persuasions, might be led to adopt the same faith and the same course.

The decline of spiritual virtue, which had been so lamentably apparent during the preceding fifty years, greatly affected the condition of Christians on the breaking out of a new persecution. Instead of looking calmly at the event as something proper to their state of trial, most of them beheld it with feelings of surprise and terror. But it produced a strange and stimulating hope in some, that the season was arrived when they might prove their heroism and fidelity, and pass like conquerors into the region of glory. Often, in these cases, it was found that the hope had no proper foundation in either faith, knowledge, or holiness. The presumption which thus wrought the ruin of many ardent minds, was supplied in others by a sentiment of humility, so solemn and overpowering, that it scarcely left the soul free to exercise its energies; but rather urged it to seek safety anywhere, or by any means, so that it might escape the ordeal before which it imagined it might tremble, and by trembling dishonour Christ.

From the operation of feelings like this, a class of believers arose who, while they doubted their power to withstand the terrors of persecution, or the allurements of the world, still felt their hearts inspired with the intensest love of the gospel.

The condition in which they were placed by these opposing fears, and their aspirations after holiness, was deeply painful. In some instances they no doubt escaped from their perplexity by improving their own in-

ward state : in others, by yielding to the pressure, and falling into a lower degree of professorship. But there were still remaining those who had neither the strength to contend, nor the baseness to give up any portion of the treasure which they possessed. In their case, flight was the only means of peace and safety which remained. They rejoiced that such a remedy was still open to them, suffering as they were under numberless anxieties and distresses. Availing themselves of the help which it offered, they hastened to seek in the wild and remote solitude protection from the persecutor—security against the world, and repose to their doubting, tempted, and harassed spirits.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST ASCETICS — PAUL THE HERMIT — ST. ANTHONY—
HERESIES—SABELLIUS—PAUL OF SAMOSATA—MANES—STATE
OF THE CHRISTIANS—EVENTS IN THE REIGN OF DIOCLETIAN.

It has been questioned to whom the merit ought to be assigned of having instituted the ascetic life. According to the more common opinion, St. Anthony was the first of those who began to inhabit the desert. But Jerome observes,* that this was not strictly the case, and that he is only spoken of as the head of the solitaries, or hermits, from the vast influence which he exercised by his example and precepts over all who afterwards adopted the ascetic rule. Paul, a young man of Thebais, was the first to flee from the terrors of persecution, with the hope of perfecting his faith by a life of constant solitude and uninterrupted meditation. At the time when the Decian persecution commenced, he was but sixteen years of age. His mind had been carefully cultivated, and his ability and sweetness of disposition derived a higher charm from his early profession of the gospel. He had an only sister, left an orphan with himself, but both inherited an ample fortune from their deceased parents. The sister having married, Paul became an inmate in her house, and was residing there when the persecution raged most violently through Egypt and the Thebais. Paul, though so young,

* Vita S. Pauli Eremitæ. Op. t. iv. p. 69.

had rendered himself conspicuous by his virtues; and there was no probability of his escaping the vigilance of the persecution if he remained longer under his sister's roof. Flight, therefore, being still open to him, he retired to a remote village, and appeared to have found in its peaceful seclusion the very home most suited to his feelings.

But scarcely had he taken his departure, when the husband of his sister conceived the wretched idea of making himself master of his fortune by securing his immediate apprehension. Tears and entreaties, it is said, were in vain employed by the unhappy wife. Avarice completely overpowered every natural feeling in the heart of the miserable man. He pretended that concern for his own religion urged him to surrender the youth to the magistrates; and, acting accordingly, measures were immediately adopted for pursuing Paul to his retreat. Happily, his sister, or other friends, found means to warn him of the impending danger. No time was to be lost; and Paul, instantly leaving the village, hastened into the neighbouring desert.

After a long and painful journey, he arrived at the foot of a rocky mountain. Observing on one side of the hill an entrance into a cave, but blocked up with stones, he laboured to make an opening into the recess. This he at length accomplished, and found himself in a spacious cavern, which appeared to be one of those which the Egyptians are known to have sought in the troubled times of Cleopatra, for the purpose of secretly coining money, and for other similar objects. The innermost part of the cavern was open to the sky, but shaded by the wide spreading branches of an ancient palm-tree. Close to the roots of the old tree, a small, clear fountain bubbled up, and formed a purling stream, which, creating fertility along

its narrow banks, was soon again lost in the sands. In the immediate neighbourhood of the cave were the remains of deserted hovels, of workshops and forges, showing that in past years the spot had been frequented by men of a very different class to those who were in another age to make it their consecrated abode.

Awful as the intense loneliness of the place seemed at first to the youthful mind of Paul, he soon became enamoured of the solitude. He contrasted the peace and security which it afforded with the terrors from which he had escaped, and the constant anxieties and tumults of the world. His dispositions were in harmony with the tranquil elements of nature. The thoughts which before rose but indistinctly in his mind, now acquired new force and clearness. He could pray better—could meditate more deeply on heavenly mysteries, and realize, as never before, the desired intercourse with ministering angels and spirits. By degrees, the solitude became peopled with holy visions. The habit of contemplation and prayer gave a supernatural vigour to his soul; and another world seemed to open around him more than compensating him for the loss of that from which he had been driven.

The palm-tree, with its fruit and its leaves, and the running brook, furnished the hermit with all that he needed in that absolute solitude in which he passed his life. Not a sound reached him from the busy scenes and populous cities which lay beyond the desert. The idea of ever returning into the world was soon entirely lost to his mind; and year after year passed away, no other sign marking his transition from youth to manhood and old age. but the increasing solemnity of those convictions and lofty delights of thought which had at first rendered him content with solitude.

Paul, it is said, lived to be more than a hundred years old. But before he died, he was visited by another recluse, no less remarkable than himself for his piety and asceticism. This was the celebrated St. Anthony, who, like himself, had been left an orphan at an early age, and in possession of a considerable estate. It was, however, not from necessity that Anthony gave up his claims to the fortune which he inherited. The example of the primitive Christians, and some passages of Scripture, induced him to believe that he could not fulfil the demands of the gospel, or live consistently with his profession, if he did not resign his wealth.* Acting upon this conviction, he distributed his property among his relations and the poor, and then retired to a homely village, in which he trusted to be sufficiently separated from the world for all the purposes of contemplation and piety.

St. Anthony divided his time between reading, praying, and working in the fields. His mode of living was in correspondence with the severity of his views respecting Christian holiness; and it is difficult to say whether his watchings and fastings, or the labours which he underwent, afforded the better proof of his fitness to become the founder of Monasticism.

But he was too near the world to be freed from its ordinary temptations. The infected atmosphere was still around him; and he suffered as one whose constitution may be vigorous enough to keep off disease itself, but who cannot altogether resist the sensation of sickness.

* Vita S. Antonii. S. Athanasii, Op. t. i. p. 785. The life of St. Anthony is said to have been written by Athanasius, about the year 365, at the request of the Western monks. It is supposed to have suffered many interpolations, but is alluded to with great respect by several ancient authors.

Suggestions, persuading him to seek pleasure, or to relax the severity of his self-discipline—to go back for a time into the world—to endeavour to do good, and to serve God with less peculiarity and sternness—these were perpetually present to his mind; and had it not been for the especial grace vouchsafed him, he must have sunk under the conflict.

The lesson which he learnt from what was going on within his heart, led him to exercise greater self-denial than before. His only food was dry bread and a little salt—water his only drink. Even from this simple nourishment he often refrained for two or three days together, and sometimes even for four. In order to strengthen himself still more by earnest prayer, he left his usual retirement, and sought an ancient sepulchre, at some distance from the village. There he practised severities, saw visions, encountered spiritual conflicts; which, in whatever sense the account given by St. Athanasius is to be taken, prove that the most remarkable impressions had been made upon his mind by the force of Christian doctrine as then received.

Penetrating further into the unpeopled parts of the country, St. Anthony, some time after, took up his abode in a ruined castle. Having supplies of bread brought him, he continued there for twenty years, without beholding any one even of his dearest friends.* At length, a mingled sentiment of curiosity and admiration induced some of them to besiege him in his fortress; and when they could not induce him by their entreaties to come forth, they broke down the gate, and convinced him they would not depart till he had given them his blessing.

* Vita S. Antonii. S. Athanasii, Op. p. 806.

When he appeared among them, they were astonished to find that no change had been wrought upon him by his long solitude. The happiness and tranquillity which were depicted on his countenance proved to them how well he had struggled against the temptations with which he was early beset, and how little he now felt the want of any of those pleasures or luxuries which he had sacrificed by leaving the world.

Having entered into conversation with those who now so eagerly surrounded him, he represented to them the advantages attending a life of seclusion, and the blessings which the soul enjoys when emancipated by prayer, meditation, and careful discipline, from the tyranny of the passions. Many who heard him readily assented to the truth of his words; and in a short time the hills and valleys about the dilapidated castle in which he had fixed his own abode, were covered with the cells of anchorites—the proper forerunners of those who afterwards, by a more regular institution and discipline, formed the vast monastic establishments, so peculiarly characteristic of a succeeding age. Those who first adopted this course were, for the most part, influenced by St. Anthony's own example and precepts. But when persecution raged, the foundation of asceticism furnished an easy means of escape to the timid and the conscientious. However much, therefore, according to our present notions of duty, we may see to blame in the ascetics, as forsaking the ordinary duties and obligations of life, the censure ought plainly to be restricted to those among them who left the world while it was still possible for them to continue in it with safety and usefulness. But a large number of the solitaries had fled into the wilderness because they saw no other alternative but that of either denying their faith, or

seeking safety by flight. In what degree they deserved reprobation for not having courage to face torture and death, is a doubtful question. But they plainly chose the less guilty course when they resolved rather to leave the world far, and for ever, behind them, than to blaspheme Christ. They knew their weakness; they dare not encounter the trial in which it might be overpowered; and with all their sorrows and imperfections, they buried themselves in the solitude in which it seemed possible for them to secure that spiritual growth, which they had failed to obtain under other circumstances.

Paul, the hermit, had nearly arrived at the end of his days, when St. Anthony thus saw rising around him a new community of followers. He boasted, it is said, of having been the first to adopt the ascetic life. But one day, after conversing on this subject, it was suggested to him in a vision, so says the ancient narrative, that a man, far more ancient than himself, had long preceded him in this career.* Inspired by the desire of beholding and conversing with so remarkable a personage, St. Anthony, now near ninety years of age, set out with the intention of traversing the desert, till he should discover the retreat of his venerable brother. A weary and fearful journey it was to him. The wild beasts and monsters of the wilderness continually crossed his path. Strange voices seemed to sound in his ears; and when the gloom of night fell upon him, it was the power of his faith only which kept him from sinking under the horrors which surrounded him. At length a glimmering light appeared in the distance. He hastened towards it as well as his feeble limbs would allow him. But the path was rough, and he struck his foot against a stone with so much violence, that it

* Vita S. Pauli Eremitæ. S. Hieron. Op. t. iv. p. 70.

forced from him a loud expression of pain. No sound of human voice had been heard in that solitude for many years. Strange feelings awoke in the mind of Paul as, startled from his devotions, he listened to the cry. He came to the door of the cavern, but as quickly retreated, as if inspired with the sudden dread of being again brought into contact with that world from which he had now been so long separated. St. Anthony, however, knew that he had reached the place which he had sought with so much toil. Approaching the entrance of the cavern, he called aloud to the venerable hermit, and entreated him to come forth, and communicate with him in prayer and blessing.

Paul yielded to the entreaties of his brother; and the two aged men, falling into each other's arms, lifted up their voices to heaven, praising God for the grace which they had mutually received. "But why," said Paul, "can you have come so far, and have borne so much toil, to see one who will so soon be dust, and who is already bowed down with the weight and deformities of old age? But charity," he continued, "sustains all things : tell me, then, how does the human race go on ? Have new buildings arisen in the ancient cities ? Under what government is the world now placed ?"*

St. Anthony would gladly have remained with Paul, listening, from day to day, to the solemn discourse upon which he entered; and strengthening his soul with those bright prospects of coming glory, which seemed to cast their light about them as the old man spoke. But Paul wished to die alone, and desiring him to return home, and procure for him a valued pall in which to wrap his body, he speedily after expired. When St. Anthony,

* Vita S. Pauli Eremitæ. Hieron. Op. t. iv. p. 72.

having executed his commission, again sought the cavern, he saw his body in a kneeling posture, and with the hands stretched out, indicating that he had died in the act of prayer. At first, Anthony supposed that he ~~was~~ but involved in deep and silent adoration, and kneeling down by his side, he began to pour out his own heart in thanksgivings and supplications. But no sigh answered to his ; no low and sweet Amen! followed the heavenly aspiration. He discovered that the spirit of the saint had fled; and yielding to his own natural feeling, he wept, and lamented bitterly that he had not remained with him, to receive his final blessing.

The influence which St. Anthony exercised on the minds of his followers increased daily. Under his guidance, they learnt how to find in their retirement reasons for greater diligence and activity than they had ever before employed. The severity with which they watched the movements of their own hearts, was in itself a valuable discipline ; and had the solitude to which either persecution or other circumstances reduced them, been but for a time ; had they returned from it to their duties in the world, as soon as liberty was given them to do so, there can be little doubt, but that the truths which they had imbibed in their lonely communings and exercises, would have manifested their power in a pure and revived Christianity.

But these remarkable men commenced their ascetic lives at a period very different from that in which they were brought to a close. A long season of varied prosperity and distress intervened ; and at its termination, the church was found on the eve of taking a position in the world, which only the most ardent and hopeful of believers could have expected it so soon to occupy. The

emperors who followed Decius acted towards the Christians with the same capriciousness as their predecessors. Sometimes manifesting a degree of indulgence, which it is difficult to account for, they at others pursued the faithful, as if they were the authors of every calamity which could befall mankind.

A.D.
284. Diocletian and Maximian, whose names occupy a conspicuous place in the catalogue of persecutors, allowed a considerable portion of their reign to pass, before they exercised any cruelty against the Christians. The martyrs, who suffered in the interval, fell victims, it is usually said, to the tyranny of the provincial magistrates. But Maximian commenced his career of cruelty with a violence which amply made up for his previous delay. On his proceeding into Gaul, he wished to enlarge his army by the addition of the Theban legion, which was then in the East. In due time the troops arrived; and they joined the rest of the forces, as they were about to fall upon one of the revolted provinces, which was known to contain a large body of Christians. It was against these that the most cruel measures were in preparation; and when the soldiers of the Theban legion, which with its officers had long been converted to the faith, were ordered to attack the homes of their brethren, they shrunk from the duty; and appealed to the emperor to be spared a service so revolting to their consciences.

Maximian had halted near the little town of Octodurus, now called Martinach, in the Valaise; and the legion was stationed at the foot of the Great St. Bernard. The appeal which it had made elicited but an expression of contempt and indignation. Maximian instantly ordered every tenth man in the legion to be put to death. The sentence was submitted to without a murmur; but the

blood of their brethren was looked at by the soldiers with the same feelings as those with which other believers had contemplated the blood of martyrs. They were strengthened in their resolves, as they beheld the calm and heroic constancy of those with whom they had shared so many toils and perils.

A new order was immediately issued for a second decimation. This was submitted to as patiently as the first, but with the solemn protestation on the part of the soldiers, that they would endure any species of torture whatsoever, rather than act in opposition to the dictates of their conscience. Sending an address to the emperor, they said, "We are your soldiers, Sire, but we are also the servants of God. We owe you service in war: we owe him innocency. We receive pay from you: from him we receive life. It is not lawful for us to obey you, at the expense of renouncing God, our Creator and Master, and no less yours than ours. If nothing be demanded of us, but that which we can render without offending him, we will readily obey, as we have ever hitherto done; but if otherwise, we must obey him rather than you. We are ready to proceed against any enemy whatsoever, but we dare not imbrue our hands in the blood of the innocent. We pledged ourselves by an oath to God, before we took our oath to you; and you ought not to trust to our fidelity in the one case, if we violate it in the other. You command us to pursue the Christians; employ us in any other pursuit, and behold us devoted to your will. We confess God the Father, the author of all things; and his Son, Jesus Christ. We have seen our companions put to death, without complaining. We rejoice in the glory which they have gained by suffering for their God. No inflictions, no alarm, can induce us to revolt. We have

arms in our hands, but we resist not, for we would rather die innocent than live with guilt." This bold and pathetic remonstrance, produced no other effect on the mind of Maximian, but such as might be expected from his rude and savage nature. Instead of being induced to regard the conscientious scruples of his soldiers with mercy, he issued an order, not that another tenth should be selected and slaughtered, but that the whole legion should be put to the sword.

The hatred and jealousy with which the idolaters, who formed the main body of the army, beheld the Christians, furnished the emperor with ready instruments for the execution of his sanguinary purpose. When the sentence, which doomed the brave Theban band to destruction, was pronounced, its three principal officers, Mauritius, Exuperus, and Candidus, stood forward, as if only about to lead it to some certain and glorious victory. Their piety and heroic fortitude were cheerfully imitated by the whole legion; and on the appearance of the troops appointed to perform the murderous execution, not a man shrunk from his profession or left his ranks, but each calmly laid down his weapons, and submitted his neck unresistingly to the sword lifted against him.*

* Considerable doubt exists respecting the historical truth of the circumstances here described. Their accuracy depends upon a narrative, written in the sixth century, by Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, entitled, *Passio Sanctorum Mauricii ac Sociorum ejus*. The strongest argument advanced against the truth of the relation is derived from the silence of the earlier authors on the subject, it being difficult to imagine how so remarkable an occurrence should have been left unnoticed by writers living near the period when it occurred. But a traditionary account of the event has been traced up to the beginning of the fifth century. A temple to the memory of the martyrs existed at that period on the spot; and it was then the

It is the unhappy character of persecution, that one sanguinary act generally encourages the evil spirit which has prompted it to a long series of subsequent barbarities. Maximian's whole course through Gaul was marked by the most furious persecution of the Christians. Several bishops, and other distinguished men, fell at this time; and in most of these cases, the exalted spirit of vital faith appears to have supported the martyrs in their terrible conflict.

Constantius and Galerius, having been admitted to a share of the imperial power, new parties and interests were created, which did not fail, in due time, to produce some change in the position of the Christians. Constantius was endowed with many qualities, which fitted him to be rather the protector than the enemy of the church. His exaltation was a providential event; and may properly be regarded as the first of those which hastened forward the more general diffusion and establishment of Christianity. But many were the afflictions which the church had to endure before this was accomplished. A large portion of these sorrows arose from the bold expression of opinions, which savoured less of evangelical simplicity, and spiritual-mindedness, than of the pride of heresy. One of the most conspicuous of the erring teachers of this age, was Sabellius, of Pentapolis.* According to the account given of his heresy, in the letters

general belief of the people of the Valaise, that a host of martyrs had suffered in their neighbourhood. It is more difficult to explain the origin of this general belief in the truth of the narrative, than to account for the silence of historians. Mosheim, never very anxious to support traditionary accounts, was evidently disposed to adopt this.—
De Rebus Christian. Ante Constant. Sæculum iii. c. xxii.

* Eusebius. Eccles. Hist. lib. vii. c. 6.

of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, it was equally opposed to the glory of the Father, and the perfections of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Dionysius employed both his talents and his influence against Sabellius, but only with imperfect success. The heresy obtained many advocates, some of whom occupied high places in the church.

It is difficult to determine what were the exact views of Sabellius. The common opinion is, that he represented the three persons of the blessed Trinity, as three only in name; the appellations of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost arising simply from the different operations performed by the one eternal God. Thus, that He is called *the Father*, when He executes works of a paternal character—such as those of creation and providence. *The Son*, when He acts and works in the son, performing those things which pertain to men's salvation; and *the Holy Spirit*, when He is contemplated as the principle or fountain of all virtue and holiness.* But other writers contend, that Sabellius did not represent the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as only three names of one God; but that he asserted that the Father alone is God; that the Son is so called because he is a certain divine virtue, bestowed by the Father on the man Christ, that he might be able to open the way of salvation to sinners; and that the Holy Spirit is also another emanation from divinity, sent forth to work upon the human soul, and exalt it to God.

Whichever of these accounts be true, it is plain that Sabellius was one of those busy, speculative men with which the age abounded, and who could not remain content to receive the ancient faith in its fulness and sim-

* St. Basil, speaking of this heresy, says, that it was in reality Judaism, under the appearance of Christianity.—Epist. 210. t. iii. p. 315.

plicity. Paul of Samosata occasioned still greater disturbance in the church than Sabellius. He occupied the high and dignified position of bishop of Antioch, and principal minister in the court of Zenobia, the celebrated queen of Palmyra.* Adopting opinions which he could most readily accommodate to the tastes of the world, he spoke of our Lord as a mere man, then only beginning to exist when born of his mother Mary; and owing his power and glory, not to any essential superiority of nature, but to the indwelling of the Word, which employed him as its agent or instrument. But this notion involved difficulties from which he could not extricate himself, without having recourse to the hypothesis of two Christs and two Sons of God—the one his Son according to essence, and coeternal with him; the other, obtaining that title from the obedience which he rendered in performing the work which had been given him to do.†

The publication of these opinions, so contrary to the creed of the church, produced great alarm in the minds of the orthodox clergy. Dionysius of Alexandria was appealed to; and he immediately took up his pen to refute the heretics, whom a mere act of authority might have been insufficient to subdue. But a new perplexity was created by the zeal of Dionysius. Some expressions escaped him in his writings against Sabellius, which seemed derogatory to the divinity of Christ. The bishop of Rome being called upon to notice the doubtful argument of Dionysius, messengers were sent to Alexandria, requiring an explanation on the subject. It was readily and easily given. Dionysius declared and proved the orthodoxy of his doctrine; and on directing his attention

* S. Athanasius. *Hist. Arian.* Op. t. i. p. 387.

† S. Athanasius. *De Synodis*, c. iv. Op. t. i. p. 739.

to the proceedings of Paul of Samosata, he set forth, in powerful language, his own belief, and that of the church, in the essential Godhead of our Lord.

But the conduct of Paul required severer measures than those involved in the confutation of his doctrine. He affected the manners of an Oriental prince rather than those of a Christian bishop. Of mean birth, and possessing no inheritance, he had accumulated considerable wealth from the profits of his office, and the corrupt employment of his influence. His pride displayed itself in a variety of offensive ways to the clergy; and it is difficult to say whether his manners and morals, or his errors, were the more hateful to those around him.

When no further hope was entertained that persuasion, or remonstrance, could induce the haughty prelate to recede from his injurious designs, a synod was held for the purpose of establishing his guilt, and depriving him of his dignity.* Alarmed at the proceedings, he confessed his error, and escaped deposition. But he soon after fell back, and a second synod was assembled. A vast number of bishops attended this meeting; but the defence of the catholic doctrine was committed to Malchion, who had long presided over one of the schools of philosophy at Antioch, and had been admitted to the order of presbyter, as the reward of his labours in the cause of true religion. The power with which he spoke, on this occasion, was felt by Paul of Samosata himself. His eloquence touched the heart of the accused prelate. He could neither reply to his arguments, nor resist his exhortations. Yielding to the feelings with which he was inspired, he declared to the synod that he saw the error into which he had fallen;

* Eusebius Hist. Eccles. lib. vii. c. 29.

that he retracted his heretical profession; and was ready to acknowledge the truth of the catholic creed. But the retractation came this time too late to save his dignity. The varied offences of which he had been guilty were distinctly set before the numerous clergy assembled; and as soon as the sentence of deposition had been pronounced against him, another bishop was elected in his place.

It is not, however, to be supposed, that the evil wrought by such men as Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, or Noetius, another heretic teaching similar doctrines, ceased with the career of its authors. The opinions which they published excited curiosity; inspired doubt in the minds of those whose faith was not well established, and rendered argument and dispute, and the exercise of ingenuity in religious inquiry a fashion, as well as a necessity, among those who had otherwise devoted themselves entirely to the offices of devotion.

Nor had the principles of those heresies which troubled the church in its earliest days lost any of their power or virulence. One ruling system had gathered into itself whatever there was of attractive error in the older sects. It had combined, with their original corruptions of the truth, those which were proper to each successive age, and then quickened the whole with its own daring spirit of speculation, pretending that it had made discoveries, and was still rejoicing in the realms of pure inquiry, because it had left the beaten path-way of received doctrine.

The system to which allusion is here made was that of the Manichæans. Their original leader, Manes,* owed, if tradition speak true, both his learning and his station

* Eusebius, lib. vii. c. 31.

to the bounty of a lady, the widow of an Egyptian, who had himself pretended to the knowledge of divine mysteries. Manes was a Persian child, and in his own country, when purchased as a slave by his benefactress. The high intellectual powers which he soon displayed induced her to cultivate his mind; and she bequeathed to him, at her death, both her ample fortune, and the mystical writings which had belonged to her husband.*

Thus furnished, Manes commenced his course as the author of a new religion. If we may judge from the doubtful records which exist of his proceedings, he adopted, like other heretics, as much of the gospel as seemed fitted to become the medium of his designs, while the rest of his system was made up of his own inventions, or of notions gathered from the writings of the ancient philosophers. His pretensions might have been long allowed in Persia, had it not been for a bold attempt which he made to cure the king's son by his prayers or incantations, and which failing, brought upon him the wrath of the monarch, with all the terrors of imprisonment and torture.

Escaping from his prison, Manes fled into Mesopotamia. There he found opportunity to diffuse his opinions among many minds, disposed to religious sentiment, but more inclined to embrace a system merely intellectual or imaginative, than to submit themselves to the rule of the Divine Spirit. The fundamental principle in the heresy of Manes was that of much older times—the belief, that is, in the existence of two distinct powers reigning over the universe, the one good and the other evil. To eman-

* Cyril. Cateches. vi. c. 24. The original name of Manes was Cubricus. He assumed the Persian name of Manes, which signifies discourse, as indicative of his powers of reasoning.

cipate whatever is capable of becoming holy or happy from the dominion of darkness, Christ and the Holy Spirit, it is said, proceeded from their respective homes—the one from the sun and moon, the other from the regions of the air. Corresponding to the general view of the system of the universe, was that taken of the nature of man, in whom Manes pretended there exist two spirits—the one allied to darkness, the other to light—to secure the final victory of the latter, being the proper object of all human exertion.

Like the originators of other heresies, Manes proclaimed himself the Paraclete spoken of in the gospel. With all the authority supposed to be proper to such a being, he instituted a system characterized by the most rigid pretensions to purity. Apostles, and other teachers, were ordained to carry out the design thus planned; and vast numbers of deluded people listened with awe and wonder to the discourses of the false prophet. But others were equally enraged at the blasphemies which they heard. Manes, therefore, finding himself exposed to popular resentment, secretly returned into Persia. He had been continually watched by the emissaries of the enraged king; and no sooner did he pass the boundaries than he was apprehended and flayed alive; his body being cast to the dogs, and his skin stuffed with straw, to be hung up as an object of mockery to the people.

But in this case, again, the death of the heretic was not the destruction of the heresy. Manicheism continued, with various modifications, to engage the attention of men, whose natural endowments were in remarkable contrast to the weakness of their spiritual discernment. One of the greatest ornaments of the following century, or of any age of the church, St. Augustine, was, prior to his con-

version, an ardent admirer of that compound of tradition and philosophy which went under the name of Manicheism. This is sufficient to show that it contained elements of thought from which minds of a certain class could derive pleasure and excitement. When submitted to the test of truth and Scripture, it gave ample proof of its poisonous character; but the test could be applied by those only who possessed it, and hence, in numberless cases, the fascinating power of the heresy was allowed, without inquiry, to work according to its proper nature and direction.

While the inventions of Manes furnished the more imaginative class of minds with employment, and kept them from the gospel by involving them in a labyrinth of startling speculations, the spirit of the old philosophies was also revived, and the sedatest of believers were assailed by questions which would have been dangerous even to them, but for their pure and lively faith.

Porphyry was the author of this revival of philosophy. He was born at Tyre, about the year 233. He visited Rome in 253, and again ten years after, when he remained six years, studying in the school of Plotinus,* at that time the most distinguished philosopher in Italy. So little happiness, however, did Porphyry derive from his advancement in knowledge, that he would have put an end to his life, had not Plotinus suggested that such a design was more proper for one overpowered by disease than for a philosopher.

* Plotinus was the disciple of Ammonius, under whom Origen had acquired so much of his erudition. Ammonius himself taught philosophy at Alexandria, at the beginning of the third century, and was the founder of the Eclectics.—Brucker. *Institut.* part i. lib. i. c. 2.

A residence in Sicily appears to have cured Porphyry of his melancholy.* But the teaching of Plotinus now produced its proper fruits; and among other works composed by Porphyry was one, consisting of fifteen books, against the Christians and their religion. The treatise was considered of sufficient importance to demand the attention of the most learned men of the church in that age;† and when the character and ability of those who answered it are considered, little doubt can be entertained of the dangerous vigour which marked its contents. A still clearer proof was given of the hateful character of the book in the time of Constantine, that emperor passing a decree which consigned it publicly to the flames. But the doubts which it suggested, the arguments which it boldly advanced, had time to become popular. Thus Christian teachers had a new species of difficulty with which to contend in assailing the powers of darkness. Men who had no taste for mysticism, and who would never have rejected the gospel for the sake of the wild imaginations of heresy, could be easily induced to listen to the acute reasoning founded on the objections of Porphyry. The world, in its ordinary state of feeling and intellectuality, obtained, at his hands, strong weapons for its everyday conflict with advancing Christianity. Infidels, hitherto, had been obliged to plunge into the depths of some difficult speculation—to argue from Platonism, or other

* Eusebius. *Eccles. Hist. lib. vi. c. 19.*

† Eusebius of Cæsarea, the historian; Methodius, and Apollinarius, are the three authors named as having written formal confutations of Porphyry's work. Their books, like those of the philosopher against whom they wrote, have all perished.—Hieron. *Op. t. iv. 122. t. iii. 1071.*

philosophical systems, when they desired to trouble the advocates of Christ; but now it was enough if they could recollect the common-places of Porphyry.

Thus infidelity then assumed the character which it has borne in later times. History and criticism entered into the elements of its discourse, and by numberless superficial objections confounded the minds of readers who were not qualified to look below the surface of the argument. So far, however, was this from proving a real injury to the church, that, by the overruling grace of God, it produced, in the course of time, incalculable benefits to religion. In answering Porphyry and his followers, the defenders of the faith found it necessary to investigate, with severe attention, the minutest points of Christian evidence. For this purpose a more careful application of the rules of criticism—more cautious historical investigation—was found to be necessary. Hitherto, the deep conviction of truth had seemed to require but its own full and unrestrained expression to subdue men's hearts and minds. Thus, with the simpler facts and doctrines of the gospel, many teachers of religion had unsuspectingly combined the opinions which had their birth rather in devotion than in knowledge. When the enemies of holiness began to apply themselves to the direct examination of evidence, the interpretations and commentaries which were but the spiritual exercises of devout souls, offered many points open to attack. The danger of allowing things to remain in this state was soon discovered by the powerful minds engaged in the defence of the gospel; and while those who could feel no delight in the severer processes of investigation were left to their favourite exercises of contemplation, these trained themselves for the conflict with the

disbeliever, and gradually formed a class to which the interests of Christianity have been, in every successive age, largely indebted for protection.

Such was the character of the controversies carried on during the greater part of the third century. Unhappily, the prevailing temper of Christians was not favourable to their cause. * A few years of tranquillity had wonderfully increased the number of professed members of the church. In every province of the empire persons were found who gladly availed themselves of the first appearance of returning tranquillity to throw off their allegiance to the gods of heathenism. Nor was it among the poor or obscure merely that this movement took place in favour of Christianity. The imperial palaces contained many believers, some of them officers of state, and others members of the imperial family itself.

But this prosperity, as in former instances, fostered the growing spirit of sensuality and worldliness. The clergy assumed a style of dress, and mode of living, which indicated that their revenues and their pride were increasing in the same proportion. Envy and strife continually appeared in their conduct towards each other; and their efforts were in many instances directed rather to secure the power of tyrants than to show themselves pastors of Christ's flock.*

Had the melancholy account from which these particulars are gathered been given by an enemy, we might well have suspected its correctness. But it is the narrative of a bishop and a scholar—of one, that is, who cannot be supposed to have had any wish to lessen the glory of the church in the eyes of mankind. He desired to ex-

* Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* lib. viii. c. 1.

plain the divine proceedings—to justify God in his chastisements of his people; and their melancholy abandonment of the first principles of the gospel afforded him the plainest of arguments and illustrations.

A. D. 302. The persecution thus alluded to did not become general till the nineteenth year of Diocletian's reign. Up to that period he had treated the Christians with the most indulgent tolerance. Noble churches had been erected in all the great cities, while that at Nicomedia, the favourite residence of Diocletian, surpassed them all in size and splendour. The emperor understood well the importance of not interfering with a people now become so numerous, and capable, if really excited to resistance, of working so much ill to the government. In this opinion he would probably have continued had it not been for the arts employed by some deadly enemies of the Christians to excite his jealousy. Among those who commenced this work were the haruspices. When Diocletian was with his army in the East, and desired to be instructed as to the future, these men pretended that the entrails of the victims which they inspected, according to his desire, presented none of the usual prophetic appearances. When the reason of this was demanded, they immediately answered, that some Christians stood near during the ceremony, and had made the sign of the cross.

Enraged at this intelligence, Diocletian instantly ordered that the Christian soldiers should be compelled to attend the sacrifices. The order was gladly executed by those who were equally desirous of the emperor's favour and the blood of the Christians. Many were the brave men who fell on this occasion. Practised as they were to implicit obedience in all other things, nothing could in-

duce them to perform the slightest act which savoured of idolatry.

For some time the persecution was almost confined to the army. But in the year 302, the Cæsar Galerius Maximian visited Diocletian, who was passing the winter in his palace at Nicomedia. The Christians had never had more bitter or determined enemies than Galerius and his mother. They were both devoted to the ancient forms of heathenism, and anxiously sought to convince Diocletian that whatever distresses afflicted or threatened the empire, might be easily accounted for if he rightly considered his guilt in fostering the Christians. The natural good sense of Diocletian struggled for some time against the force of superstition. Superior in mental vigour to those with whom he was discoursing, he urged many topics which proved how well he had weighed some of the most important points on the subject of persecution.

But though better instructed, and of more powerful mind than his colleagues, Diocletian, at this period of his life, was as much the slave of superstition as the meanest of his subjects. The suggestions, therefore, of Galerius at length wrought, with overpowering force, upon his imagination. He trembled as he thought of the immeasurable calamities with which the gods might overwhelm the empire, and in the end pour upon his own devoted head the still fuller measure of their wrath. Starting, as if in a frightful dream, at the vision which rose before him, he resolved to take instant measures for averting the dreaded ruin. But not satisfied with having the opinion of Galerius merely to justify him in a measure which might involve so many political consequences, he called to his counsel some of the most distinguished of his generals, and other persons of high rank. They hesitated not to

agree with Galerius. An appeal was then made to the oracle of Apollo. Strange to say, the answer came not as usual, if tradition speak true, from the priestess, but from the depths of the cavern; and the sentence was, that, "the just which were on the earth" had deprived the oracle of its power to give true answers to those who frequented the shrine. The priestess herself, with dishevelled hair, said the same thing, and lamented aloud the misery of the human race.

Excited by new fears at this strange circumstance, Diocletian eagerly inquired who were "the just upon the earth." One of the ministers, engaged in performing the rites, immediately answered, that the Christians were so described. Diocletian, interpreting the reply according to his own dark imagination, was now satisfied that he ought to lose no time in putting his design into execution. The last day of the old Roman year, the feast of *Terminales*, was fixed upon as the most proper for the work.* As soon as the morning dawned, a body of men, headed by the prefect and other officers, proceeded to the church. The doors being forced open, the party rushed in, tore down and destroyed whatever came in their way; seized upon the copies of the Scriptures which they found, and burnt them, only pausing in the work of destruction when the solidity of the edifice itself resisted their further attempts.

Domitian and Galerius watched eagerly from the windows of the palace for some sign that their commands were properly executed. Impatient at the slow progress which was made—enraged to see the noble church still crowning the lofty eminence on which it stood—they de-

* Eusebius *Eccles. Hist. lib. viii. c. 2.*

terminated to issue an order for its being destroyed by fire. But scarcely had the thought entered their minds, when it was followed by a feeling of dread that the flames might be communicated to the city, and occasion a general conflagration. Desisting, therefore, from their first intention, they ordered out a troop of Pretorian soldiers, who, heavily armed with the proper implements of destruction, hastened to the sacred building, and in the course of a few hours levelled it with the ground.

But this was only the commencement of the ruin intended. Early the next day an edict was published, dooming the rest of the churches to destruction, and ordering the Scriptures to be searched for and burnt. In respect to the Christians themselves, they were to be deprived of whatever rank or dignities they might possess—to be subjected to torture—to be prohibited from defending themselves or their property in any court of law. This infamous proclamation was no sooner fixed up, than some Christian of rank tore it indignantly from the walls. The guards instantly seized him. He was put to the torture, and then burnt alive; exhibiting throughout the same patience and fervour as the martyrs of earlier times.

Another edict speedily followed upon that already published. By this it was directed, that means should be taken for the immediate apprehension of all bishops, and that when brought before the magistrates, they should be compelled to sacrifice. In order to render these measures effectual in every part of the empire, Maximin and Constantius were exhorted to unite with their colleagues in the movement which they had commenced. Still Galerius was not satisfied. His superstition maddened him. The progress made in apprehending the Christians appeared too slow; and he resolved on a bold stratagem to precipi-

tate Diocletian at once into the vortex of persecution. Contriving, therefore, secretly to set fire to the palace, the favourite residence of Diocletian, the Christians were accused as the authors of the calamity. Some of the most faithful of the servants of the court—some even of its highest officers, were known to be zealous worshippers of Jesus. Even the wife and daughter of Diocletian had shown their attachment to the gospel. They were now obliged to offer sacrifice. The suspected servants and ministers were instantly put to the torture, and soon after suffered death. A large number of priests and deacons were apprehended at the same time, and subjected to a similar punishment. The bishop of Nicomedia was beheaded; but the generality of the prisoners were either strangled or burnt alive. When the executioners grew weary of their work, and the multitude of confessors seemed every day to increase, they bound several of them together, and putting them into a boat, rowed them out to sea, and then cast them into the waves with huge stones hung about their necks. Even the dead bodies of those who had been beheaded or strangled, were objects on which the persecutors delighted to wreak their vengeance. They tore them from their graves, under pretence that the Christians who survived might come and worship them if they were allowed to remain in the tomb.

A revolt which took place in the East furnished the tyrants with a new pretence for carrying on the persecution. Egypt and Palestine suffered grievously on this occasion. The most devoted of the clergy in those countries were cast into loathsome dungeons, and exposed to tortures which imagination shudders to picture.* Nor did

* Eusebius says, that the prisons which had hitherto been tenanted by robbers and murderers only, were now filled with bishops, pres-

they suffer alone. Many of the people readily shared their perils and agonies. The spirit which reigned in the hearts of some gave even an awful and terrible character to their devotion. This was remarkably instanced in the case of one of the martyrs who suffered at Antioch. Romanus was a deacon and exorcist of the church of Cæsarea;* but had visited Antioch soon after the breaking out of the persecution. While there, he beheld with grief and astonishment crowds of people worshipping their idols, and rushing eagerly and with an air of triumph to behold the destruction of the Christian temples. Unable to repress his feelings, he called aloud to the benighted multitude, and warned them of their guilt and of the wrath of God. Indignant at the reproofs which he uttered, the officers in attendance seized him, and carried him before the magistrate. He was condemned to the torture; and in the midst of protracted agonies spoke aloud of the hideous folly of the heathen, and of the power of the gospel.

While standing at the tribunal, he spoke of the knowledge of divine things—of the love of truth and holy fortitude, which every sincere Christian possessed, as a proof of the heavenly origin of his faith. “Ask even yon child,” he said, pointing to a little boy, named Barylus, just seven years old, “and he will tell you whether it is better to worship idols, or the one only and true God.” Then calling the child to him, he questioned him as to his knowledge of divine things. Barylus replied, There is but one God, and Jesus Christ is the true God.

byters, deacons, and exorcists, so that no place remained for those who had been found guilty of actual crimes.—Eccles. Hist. lib. viii. c. 6.

* Eusebius *De Martyribus Palæstinæ*, c. ii.

By an almost inconceivable act of barbarity, the judge ordered the mother of the child to stand forward, and witness the scourging inflicted on his tender body. The blood flowed copiously under each returning lash. Even those who inflicted the torture could not refrain from tears. But the mother had mastered the first agony which wrung her heart at the beginning of this frightful scene. Natural feeling was altogether powerless in such a struggle. It had, therefore, given way to a sentiment which seemed to annihilate the gloom of the present by the strong working of hope looking to the future. Fainting with pain and loss of blood, the exhausted child once cried for water to quench his thirst. His mother chid him for his weakness, and told him to be patient to the end. After a certain time both he and Romanus were ordered to be executed. The older martyr was condemned to the flames. Barylus was to be beheaded. When all things were prepared for the execution, the mother took him in her arms, and carrying him to the place of punishment, gave him to the executioner. She shed no tears; but kissed her child, and entreated him to pray for her. Then spreading her mantle near the block, she patiently awaited the falling of the axe. As soon as the stroke was given, she took up the severed head and her vest, saturated with the blood of the innocent victim, and pressing them fondly to her bosom, returned solitary to her home. Romanus, though condemned to be burnt, was strangled in his dungeon.

The number of believers who perished in this persecution greatly exceeded that of those who suffered in the earlier troubles of the church.* On some days ten or

* Eusebius Eccles. Hist. lib. viii. c. 7.

twenty were put to death. On others, as many as sixty, and even a hundred, fell; no regard being paid to station, age, or sex. The modes of torture invented proved the intense hatred which urged the persecutors forward in their sanguinary work. Year after year were these dreadful barbarities continued. To the great glory of the Christian name, the firmness and devotion of the faithful seemed to increase with the increasing fury of the persecutors. Instances of fortitude occurred as remarkable as that of St. Laurence, the Roman deacon, who accompanied Sixtus to execution in the Decian persecution, and was afterwards literally roasted alive.* Nothing that the most ingenious contrivances could effect in producing agony, and in diffusing it over every part of the body, was left undone. Every element was brought to the aid of the tormentor; and the mind sickens at even the most distant contemplation of the accumulated sufferings which were commonly inflicted on the persevering confessor.

But terrible as is the spectacle presented by the narrative of these multiplied martyrdoms, how small a part of

* St. Laurence had been called upon by the pretor to deliver up the treasures of the church. He did not deny that there were treasures under his keeping, but requested time to arrange them, that the pretor might be the better able to understand their value. Three days being allowed for this purpose, St. Laurence gathered together the lame, the blind, and the aged, who were supported from the funds of the church. When the pretor arrived, he saw a crowd of these afflicted people arranged before the edifice. Turning his eyes from the spectacle, he demanded the riches of which he was in search, and which St. Laurence had promised he should behold. "These constitute the wealth of our church," said the venerable deacon, pointing to the aged and distressed people around him. "These are the treasures of our God: our vessels of gold and silver." He was instantly apprehended and led to martyrdom.

the misery actually endured is the subject of our contemplation! The annals of religious persecution describe the modes of torture—the agonies to which the bodies of the martyrs were subjected—the horrors which surrounded them when the frenzied multitude, priests, and magistrates, all contributed their means to increase the visible terrors of death. But they tell us nothing of the heart-breaking struggles which must have been going on in the bosoms of many of the sufferers—of the intense distress which must have attended the ruin of families—the severing of the dearest ties, when friends were torn from friends, parents from their children, and children from their parents. The high, well-fortified spirits, which could readily submit to the rudest inflictions of the executioner, must often have suffered in the thoughts of home, and the desolation wrought there, a piercing grief—an anguish, which it indeed required the might of divine grace to enable them to endure.

The persecution having continued for eight years, began, after that period, to lose somewhat of its violence. It had till then raged with almost equal fury in both the eastern and western parts of the empire. But the church, being wonderfully sustained throughout by the grace of God, gained new strength in this awful season of probation. Both the clergy and the people appeared to feel, that on the fortitude which they now exercised depended the most important interests of their religion, and of those who should follow them in the faith. The abdication of Diocletian and Maximian left the field open to Galerius, Maximinus, and Maxentius, their successors in authority. No refinement of policy interfered with the resolution of these besotted tyrants to destroy the Christian name. But Divine Providence had determined how

far they might go, and where their strength should become powerless! It had said to them as to the tyrant of old—
 “The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn. The daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.”*

A. D.
 310. Galerius, after a reign of eighteen years, characterized by every species of violence and injustice, was seized with a fatal malady. His sufferings were extreme. He sought the help of his divinities with continual prayers and sacrifices; but they availed nothing. Physicians were summoned from all quarters, but they could afford no relief. Roaring with agony and rage, the tyrant ordered them to the scaffold. At length another who had been sent for had the courage to say, “Sire! you deceive yourself. Man cannot remove the malady with which God has punished you. Reflect upon the cruelties which you have inflicted upon his servants—upon your unholy opposition to religion itself—and you will then understand where and how you may best seek relief.”

Overpowered with pain, and snatching at the faintest hope of recovery, Galerius exhibited for the first time compunction and alarm. Acting according to the impressions thus made on his mind, he ordered an edict to be prepared and published, by which he restored to the Christians the liberty they had enjoyed before the persecution; permitted them to rebuild their churches, and to perform the customary rites of their religion. As an introduction to this proclamation, he sought to excuse the barbarities, perpetrated through so many years, on the plea, that his sole desire had been to bring back the Christians to the religion of their ancestors, and so to support the majesty

* 2 Kings xix. 21.

of the Roman laws. But this effort had failed. He spoke, therefore, in a tone of sorrow of the sufferings which had been incurred by the Christians, whose obstinacy or resolution had prevented them from yielding to the demands of the state, and conforming to the rule of the ancient faith. At the close of the edict, he employed a different language, and entreated the disciples of Jesus to pray for him to their God, and to implore him to grant peace and prosperity to the empire.

A vast number of confessors were delivered from the prisons and from the mines on the publication of this edict.* But it was suppressed, as far as his influence extended, by the Cæsar Maximin; and as Galerius died a few days after its publication, he found means to renew the persecution. To accomplish his design, he induced the magistrates of different cities to call upon him to expel the Christians from among them; to stop the rebuilding of the churches, and to take such other measures as might be expedient for the suppression of the sect. No time was lost in executing the will of the tyrant. The peaceful Christians, who had for six short months only enjoyed the hope of safety, were driven from their homes, and reduced to all the miseries of desolation and poverty. To give some appearance of moderation to his edict, Maximin had prohibited the magistrates from condemning the Christians to death, but allowed them to be mutilated. Hence some, we read, were delivered over to the executioner, not to be beheaded or strangled, but to have their eyes torn out. Others had their hands or feet cut off; others their nose or ears; some, notwithstanding the terms of the edict, being finally put to death.

* Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. lib. ix. c. 1.

Egypt was again the scene of persecution in its worst forms. Many of the clergy of Alexandria perished at this time. St. Peter, who had held the bishopric for twelve years, most of which were passed in toil and danger, was now apprehended and beheaded. A strange form appeared in the streets of the vast city, while preparations were being made for the execution of some confessors brought from the remoter parts of the country. It was St. Anthony.* He had heard of the sufferings to which his brethren were exposed. The persecutors, he learnt, had traced their prey to the very borders of the desert. It was not a time for him to indulge in meditation; and taking his staff, he summoned some of the monks in his neighbourhood to accompany him to the scene of conflict. On their way, they met with some of the confessors devoted to death. They heard also of others who had been condemned to imprisonment and to the mines. St. Anthony hastened to visit the captives. He sought out the mines; and by the prayers and blessings which he poured forth, the most afflicted of the brethren learnt to bear their sufferings with patience and hope.

In Alexandria itself, St. Anthony appeared by the side of the believers, against whom the judges were levelling the weightiest sentences of the law. He pleaded for them; questioned the justice of the proceedings; strengthened the weaker spirits by his stirring exhortations; and directed the thoughts of all to that heaven where He, for whom they were about to suffer, sitteth at the right hand of God. The extreme old age, and venerable aspect of the saint saved him, it is probable, from the violence with which he would otherwise have been treated. But the

* S. Athanasii, Vita S. Antonii. Op. part. i p. 831.

judges insisted that no monk should be allowed to speak in their presence; and the companions of St. Anthony fled in alarm, lest the next sentence might be pronounced against themselves. Their fears were not shared by the aged saint. He remained in Alexandria till after the martyrdom of the bishop. From that time the violence of the persecution declined; and he retired tranquilly to his solitary abode in the desert.*

During the two years that the Christians were thus subjected to the tyranny of Maximin and Maxentius, the empire was visited with the most fearful of calamities. Famine and the pestilence swept away hordes of the people; and not a hope seemed reserved for the unhappy provinces which groaned under the yoke of the new emperors. Licinius and Constantine, who had a share of the imperial power, had not yet had time to form their plans, or to take measures either for their own aggrandizement, or for the deliverance of the people. Thus the persecuted and the persecutors were involved for a time in one common calamity; and many of those who but a short time before were revelling in the sufferings of the Christians, must now, as they shrunk from the outstretched hand of divine justice, have felt how miserably wanting they were in the calm and heroic fortitude, in the patience under distress, which had been so often and so wonderfully ex-

* The persecution had now continued eight years; and two were added to it by Maximin and Maxentius. It is described by historians as the tenth in the catalogue of persecutions. Of the ten, the first took place under Nero; the second, under Domitian; the third, under Trajan; the fourth, under Antoninus; the fifth, under Severus; the sixth, under Maximinus; the seventh, under Decius; the eighth, under Valerian; the ninth, under Aurelian; and the tenth, under Diocletian.

hibited by the despised followers of Jesus. It was indeed a season of trial for all; and it may probably have been a portion of the plan especially devised by Providence, that the pride of the people should be humbled by suffering before the gospel was offered to them, not by ministers who were every instant looking for martyrdom, but by a church, which could point to the mightiest of princes as its convert and champion.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONSTANTINE—HIS CONVERSION—LICINIUS—THE DONATISTS—
COMMENCEMENT OF ARIANISM—COUNCIL OF NICÆA—ITS
CONSEQUENCES—ST. ATHANASIUS.

A WAR between Constantine and Maxentius gave rise to occurrences highly favourable to the progress of the gospel. Constantine had approached Rome, and was preparing to attack the army of his rival. His own forces were few in number compared with those of the enemy; and he was too well practised in warfare not to understand at once the disadvantages of his position. But, resolved not to desist from his enterprise, he thought of that God whom the Christians described as the sole sovereign of the universe—as the all-powerful arbiter in the struggles between nations and princes. Obeying the impulse of this new sentiment, he raised his voice to heaven, and besought the Almighty to aid him in the approaching battle, and so to order events that he might triumph over his enemy. He was thus praying, and in the hearing of his soldiers, when just above the sun, now verging towards the west, the form of a lustrous cross was seen in the heavens, and with it the words, "*By this conquer!*" It was not Constantine alone who saw this wonderful vision. It was as visible to those around him as to himself. Occupied with the thought of what had occurred, Constantine dreamed during the night that Jesus Christ instructed him

to adopt the cross which he had seen in the heavens, as the standard of his army.* The command, however given, was obeyed, and the celebrated ensign, called the *Labarum*, was seen at the head of battalions, which till now had known no nobler emblem of power and victory than the Roman eagle.

Triumphs awaited Constantine at every stage of his progress. He overthrew the army of Maxentius, and entered Rome as the successor of its proudest sovereigns. His brother-in-law, Licinius, might still have been left in peaceable possession of his share of power, had he known how to exercise it with justice and moderation. But with neither the talents nor the virtues of Constantine, he desired to usurp his place; and when he found that it was on the God of the Christians that his nobler rival reposed his hopes, he turned his rage against the Christians themselves, and sacrificed many of them to his jealousy and fury. Constantine, at length, resolved to chastise a conduct so destructive of the peace of the empire. He directed his forces against Licinius. Victory again crowned his arms; and he followed up his success with an act of fierce and terrible policy, which, though proving his want of Christian mercy, set him free at once from the interference of rivals and colleagues.

Seated securely on the throne of universal empire, Constantine manifested his grateful recollection of the help which he had received from Heaven. It is not necessary

* Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, the historian so often referred to, tells us that Constantine himself described this occurrence to him, and confirmed the truth of the relation by an oath.—*De Vita Imperatoris Constantini*, lib. i. c. xxviii. xxix.

A great difference prevails in the opinions of learned men on the subject of the cross seen by Constantine.

to charge him with hypocrisy, or to ascribe his apparent zeal for the gospel to mere political motives, because it is impossible to defend the whole of his conduct on the principles of Christianity. The impression left on his mind, by events which had the character of divine interpositions, might make him a champion of the gospel; might render him sensible to the value, truth, and purity of the religion which it revealed, and yet leave him far below the state of a true convert to the faith; below that state in which alone we may expect to find true consistency of conduct and profession.

Never had the church undergone a transition so remarkable as that which it now experienced. It was suddenly delivered from the depths of sorrow; from calamities which only increased with the patience which enabled the sufferers to endure them. Not a gleam of hope had existed to lessen the darkness of this gloomy period; and Christians were indeed of all men most miserable, but for their knowledge of another world. Wonderful was the change produced by the elevation and victories of Constantine. The church, which had been humbled to the dust, which had sat clothed in sackcloth and ashes, weeping, and bleeding from a hundred wounds, now suddenly arose, like a bride adorned with her jewels, and rejoicing in the plenitude of health, beauty, and prosperity.

The consecration of the new edifices dedicated to Christian worship, was attended in every city with the most splendid festivities. Strangers came from remote districts to be present at the solemnity. Parents, wives, friends, saw those who were most dear to them returning from the mines to which they had been condemned, or coming out of the loathsome dungeons in which they had been immured; and the day of the consecration was not that in

which churches only were restored, but in which houses, and bereaved families, and desolate, broken hearts, were replenished again with peace and gladness. Such a season must indeed have afforded to thoughtful, awakened minds, a noble image of the resurrection, when the lost will be found again; when the child shall return to his father and his mother; and the ruins of the old home shall be so handled by the great Architect, that while all things become new, that which was most precious in the old shall still be preserved.

But while the voice of joy and thanksgiving; the splendour of renovated churches; and the sublimer pomp attending the celebration of the mysteries of religion, were filling the hearts of thousands of worshippers with a deeper sense of spiritual life, new sources of disturbance were being opened by some few restless, unhappy minds.

The episcopal chair at Carthage being vacant, Cæcilian, a deacon of the church in that city, was elected to the dignity. His electors were the bishops of the province of Africa, and nothing essential to his consecration, according to the views then prevailing, appears to have been omitted. But no sooner was he seated on the throne, than he demanded the restoration of the vessels of gold and silver, which had been placed in the hands of certain persons during the persecution, to preserve them from the rapacity of the soldiers. Unhappily, the guardians of this church property had become enanoured of the precious cups and chalices which had so long adorned their secret cabinets; and when the bishop, with laudable zeal, desired to see them arranged again upon the altar, the discomfited admirers of its gold and silver, and precious stones, determined in their minds that no bishop, lawfully chosen

and consecrated, could have conceived or insisted upon such a demand.

Contemptible as men or parties may be in themselves, there are seasons in which they are sure to meet with popular support. In the present case, a preparation had been made for the efforts of those who had only their own low and personal interests to uphold. A faction existed, at the head of which was Donatus.* It was at first characterised simply by its extreme views on all points of discipline. By degrees it engaged in disputes on other matters, and at last proved a most dangerous and virulent schism. The election of Cæcilian had taken place with some degree of haste, and the bishops of Numidia were offended at not having been called upon to give their assent to the choice of the African prelates. They were ready to unite with any party which might be made an instrument of their angry feelings. Objections were soon found to the regularity of Cæcilian's appointment. A synod was held at Carthage, and sentence was pronounced for his deposition. The argument upon which this decision rested was derived from the report, that the principal personage employed in the consecration of Cæcilian was himself *a traditor*. This odious title pertained to those who, to save themselves during the persecution, had delivered up the sacred Scriptures to the magistrates or their officers. Titles of a corresponding character were given to those who had been guilty of other offences

* There were two persons of this name existing at the time of which we are speaking. The one was the bishop of the party at Carthage: the other the bishop of Casæ Nigræ, in Numidia. It is doubtful from which of these the Donatists derived their appellation.

against the faith. Thus those who threw incense upon the pagan altars were called *Thurificati*: such as purchased the right of not being called upon to sacrifice, were known as *Libellatici*: and those who had sacrificed, as *Sacrificati*. Persons so denominated were regarded by the party spoken of as essentially excommunicate, and, therefore, incapable of performing any service in the church, much more of conferring any spiritual power or dignity.

The churches of Africa, and the adjoining provinces, were shaken to their foundations by these disputes. Constantine, anxious to restore peace, directed the proconsul to support Cæcilian by the whole strength of his influence and authority.* But the magistrate found the affair too difficult for his management. Constantine, therefore, resolved to refer it to the heads of the church. A synod was accordingly convened at Rome;† and Cæcilian was confirmed in his dignity by the unanimous consent of the assembled clergy. Not satisfied with this, the Donatists pleaded to have their cause again heard. On the following year, therefore, another synod was held. It assembled in the city of Arles, and consisted of thirty-three bishops, with several priests and deacons. The decision was again in favour of Cæcilian.‡ He was thus established in his

* A. D 313.

† Eusebius.

‡ Several canons were formed at this council. Among them was one directing that Easter should be kept on the same day throughout the world; and another, which ordered, that if a heretic desired to be admitted into the church, he should be asked whether he had been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that, if he answered in the affirmative, he should not be rebaptized, but should be received into the church by imposition of hands. If, on the contrary, he had not acknowledged the Trinity, then he was to be rebaptized. By another of the canons, it was forbidden

see by the clearest expression of ecclesiastical authority; and those who resisted him, and set up a rival bishop, were manifestly guilty of schism and disorder. The evil daily increased. Separating from the universal church of Christ, the Donatists, as the schismatics were now called, set up a church of their own. They pretended that true holiness and faith existed only among themselves; that even those who were accounted orthodox, and had ever belonged to the Catholic church, ought to be rebaptized before they were admitted into communion with them; and that no church could exist where there was any appearance of unholiness.

Further measures were taken by Constantine to subdue the growing evil. Seventy Numidian bishops had declared in favour of Cæcilian's rival; and the party, instead of being alarmed into submission by the decrees of the synods held in the west, seemed continually to advance in zeal and popularity. The laws which Constantine saw himself constrained to pass effected as little good; and when measures were resorted to, which must have reawakened in some minds the terrible visions of persecution, the sufferers exhibited a degree of firmness, which plainly proved, that the utmost exertion of severity could make no impression on the determined spirit of the Donatists.

Urged almost to madness by their own fiery zeal, and by the cruelties and insults to which they saw themselves exposed, many of the party rushed eagerly to death, sometimes demanding it at the hands of the magistrates,

that one bishop alone should consecrate another. It was recommended that seven, if possible, should be present at the ceremony; but no bishop might consecrate except in the presence of, at least, three others.

at others inflicting it on themselves. From the midst of the multitude, which felt and yielded most readily to the dreadful excitement which prevailed in the faction, a body of men arose, who exhibited all the worst traits of sanguinary fanaticism.

The Circumcelliones, as they were called, would acknowledge no law but that of their own perverted consciences. They rejoiced in imbruing their hands in the blood of their opponents, and wherever they appeared, terror and confusion prevailed throughout the district. By the alternate exercise of severe justice and cautious moderation, Constantine suppressed the darker enormities of this faction. But the Donatists continued to exist as a powerful party for many years. Their bishops were distinguished, in many instances, for inflexible virtue and piety ; and by mere force of character they forced from the ruling powers a species of consideration, which would never have been rendered them on any other account.

But distressing as was the agitation produced by the movements of the Donatists, the anxieties of good and holy men were excited to a far greater degree by the rise of a heresy, more subtle than any which had, as yet, appeared to disturb the tranquillity of the church. This was that of Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria, whose accomplishments, natural genius, and moral purity, rendered him peculiarly dangerous as a preacher of novelties and error. He had been in early life accused of heresy, but he found means to convince the bishop of Alexandria of his repentance, and was in due time admitted to the priesthood. The talents which he possessed recommended him to general favour, and he was appointed to the ministry of one of the churches in the city, and to

the particular office of expositor of Scripture to the people.

In the performance of the duties connected with these appointments, Arius gained the affections of many members of the church, and felt his power to sway their minds in whichever direction he chose. The death of the bishop left the see vacant for some new aspirant to the dignity, and Arius, it is said, looked with all the desire of an ambitious mind to the possession of the high office. But Alexander was chosen in his stead ; and immediately the angry feelings of disappointed pride began to show themselves in the temper and conduct of Arius. His natural love of disputation, furnished him with the ready means of satisfying his resentment.* It had become the unhappy fashion of the times, to make the doctrines of the gospel the subject of debate. The nicest definitions, the most metaphysical arguments, entered into the discourses of bishops and presbyters when expounding the articles of their faith. In many cases, this arose from the necessity of meeting the doubts and answering the cavillings of the sceptic. But in the greater number of instances, it was the natural consequence of the collision of minds, whose activity and ambition were rather stimulated than subdued by an outward adoption of Christianity.

The new bishop of Alexandria was one of those who had taken an active part in the controversies of the age. His doctrines had never varied from the orthodox standard ; and he was generally respected for his piety and consistency. But in his efforts to confute such heresies as those of Paul of Samosata, he had necessarily employed the strongest language when describing the Divi-

* Socrates. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. v.

nity of our Lord. On the expressions thus used, Arius fixed the glance of a critic, determined to discover error. He would not leave them till he had extracted what seemed suited to his purpose. Success is rarely wanted in such cases. Something doubtful could easily be found in the conduct of an argument like that in which Alexander had been engaged. Arius, therefore, hesitated not openly to accuse him of Sabellianism ; and thus the bishop, and the clergy who most admired and respected him, were driven into a controversy, the end of which it was impossible to foresee. The popularity which Arius enjoyed, gave him no slight advantage in the struggle, He felt his power ; and rushing headlong into heresy, not only charged his bishop with heterodoxy, but proclaimed aloud, that according to the true doctrine of the Scriptures, Jesus Christ is but a created being, distinct from the Father in all the essential attributes of divinity.*

For some time no direct notice was taken of the proceedings of Arius ; and when Alexander at length saw himself constrained to exercise his authority against him, he did it with exemplary mildness and forbearance. But persuasion was lost on Arius. An assembly of the clergy was then called, and conferences were held in which Arius had full liberty given him to expound and defend his views. Confuted both by the Scriptures and the creed of the church, he still refused to retract. Alexander could now do no otherwise than pronounce upon him the sentence of excommunication. In the first instance the bishop contented himself with the support rendered him by his own clergy ; but shortly after, a council was held,

* Theodoretus Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. 2.

composed of nearly a hundred bishops, from all parts of Egypt and Lybia. This latter measure was rendered necessary by the growing influence of Arius, who now numbered among his supporters Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, and other men of high rank and influence.

The decision of the synod greatly irritated the leaders of the new party.* They regarded it as unfair and precipitate. Alexander was accused of personal prejudice; and an appeal was made to the bishops of various provinces to resist a proceeding which threatened, it was represented, the liberties of the clergy. Eusebius enjoyed the especial favour of Constantine, and Arius did not fail to employ his ingenuity in securing the confidence of so powerful an ally. By the efforts thus made, the heresy gained ground every day. Ordinary minds could with difficulty follow the reasoning of the disputants; and Arius presented his views with such an appearance of simplicity and candour, that the unwary were easily induced to accept them as true expositions of Scripture doctrine.

When the sentence which had been pronounced upon him in the synod shut him out from communion with his former associates, Arius sought an asylum with the bishop of Nicomedia. While enjoying security and leisure in the house of his patron, he composed a variety of canticles, the design of which was to render his doctrines familiar to the lowest of the people. He also, at the same time, addressed a letter to Alexander, containing a succinct statement of his principles, and such suggestions as seemed best calculated to allay the indignation with which his conduct was generally viewed in Egypt.

* Sozomen. *Hist. Eccles.* lib. i. c. 15.

This epistle to the bishop is preserved in the works of Athanasius,* and furnishes a sufficient exposition of the Arian system. However opposed to the orthodox belief, it shows that Arius never intended to represent our Lord as mere man, or as a being who had no proper or essential glory. "This is our faith," he says, "and it is that which we have learnt from our ancestors, and from thee also, O venerable father! We acknowledge one God, alone unbegotten, alone eternal, alone without beginning, alone true, alone having immortality, alone wise, alone good, alone powerful; judge of all; ruler, dispenser; immutable and unchangeable, just and good; the one same God of the law, and the prophets, and the New Testament." Our Lord is then described as the only-begotten Son—begotten before times eternal. By Him the Father made the worlds; and he is to be regarded, not as the begotten of the Father in appearance only, but in truth; as existing by God's own proper will, an immutable, unchangeable, and perfect *creature* of God, but not as one of the creatures; begotten, but not as one of the begotten. The errors of Valentinus, Sabellius, and others, are then alluded to, and Arius again repeats his own heresy; describing the Son as, "created by the will of God before all worlds and all ages; receiving from the Father life and being, and participation in the Father's glory. For the Father, when he bestowed upon him the possession of all things, did not thereby deprive himself of that possession, which he has in himself without derivation from any other. He is the fountain of all things. Thus there are three hypostases (substances,) and God who is the cause of all is without beginning, and most perfectly alone. The Son, begotten

* Op. t. i. p. 729. De Synodis.

of the Father, before time was, and created and established before the worlds, did not exist before he was begotten. But begotten before time was, and before all things, he exists alone from the Father; for he is not eternal, co-eternal, or unbegotten with the Father. Nor has he existence equally with the Father; as some say, relatively, thereby bringing in two unbegotten principles; but as a single independent being, and the beginning of all things, God is before all. Wherefore, also, He is before the Son."

In defence of the last-stated dogma, Arius appealed to Alexander himself, asserting, that he had often heard him utter the same opinion when preaching in the church. "As, therefore," he continues, "the Son receives his being from God, and life, and glory; and as all things are delivered unto him, so also is God his beginning; for God rules over him as his God, and as being before him."

"This is a part of those things," says Athanasius, "which the Arians have vomited forth from their heretical hearts."* And never, indeed, had the faith of Christians been assailed by so dangerous a species of corruption as that at present introduced. The fabrications of the earlier heretics; the speculations of Sabellius and Paul of Samosata, had something in them so base or so startling—something so manifestly opposed to the very groundwork of the gospel, that those who had become Christians could not easily be induced to listen to their authors. But Arius carefully guarded his expressions against every appearance of disrespect to the majesty of Christ. He endeavoured to prove that his own doctrines were in reality those of the church. His aim was to assert the supremacy

* De Synodis. Op. t. i. p. 730.

of the Father; but not to lower the glory of the Son, except where it seemed to interfere with the eternal and infinite perfections of the Godhead. Thus the language which he employed was calculated to bewilder minds which were not armed against his sophistry by habits of strict inquiry. When he spoke of the Son as created before time; as having received all power and dominion from the Father; as being, though created, not as one of the creatures, the understanding was dazzled with the splendour diffused about the throne of the only begotten of the Father, and was gradually led to forget the all-important force of the word *creation*, and to lose sight of the consequences which follow immediately from denying to our Lord the perfections which can only belong to an uncreated being and nature.

Alexander, it is supposed, returned no answer to this letter. He took as little notice of the applications made to him on the part of Eusebius and others. The excommunication pronounced against Arius remained in full force; but his party continued to increase; and several bishops agreed to authorize his teaching in the church, notwithstanding the sentence under which he lay. Constantine heard of the disorders which prevailed with grief and anxiety. He wrote to Alexander and Arius, expressing his sorrow at the confusion which existed, and blaming them both for indulging in a controversy which he regarded as equally vain and injurious.* The venerable

* Socrates. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. vii.

Eusebius, of Nicomedia, is supposed to have had the chief part in framing this epistle. Constantine could not have been under the influence of a worse adviser at such a time. Eusebius was in every respect favourable to Arius.

Osius, bishop of Cordova, was the bearer of Constantine's epistle; and he had received instruction to employ the influence which his virtues and reputation gave him to quiet the irritated minds of the disputants.

Osius assembled a synod in Alexandria; and succeeded in putting an end to some schismatical movements begun by Colluthus, an ambitious priest, who desired to usurp the office of a bishop. He also endeavoured to silence the disputes which existed on the subject of Easter.* But in this he failed. The quartodecimans still persevered in observing the festival on the fourteenth day of the month, in obedience, they asserted, to primitive authority and example. He was equally unsuccessful in his efforts with the Arians.† The people had arranged themselves under certain leaders who rejoiced in the growth of strife and excitement. It was not with discussion that the multitude could now be contented. Every day gave rise to some open conflict.‡ The statues of the emperor were thrown down; and the city bore the appearance of a place suffering the evils of a popular insurrection.

Constantine, as a prudent governor, heard of the little effect produced by his letter, and the persuasions of his counsellors, with no less alarm than disappointment. The Christians were no longer the simple, spiritual people which they had been in earlier times, and which, according to their traditional character, it might still be supposed they were if viewed only generally, and at a distance. But Constantine beheld them as a politician. He venerated their doctrines; he admired and loved the

* Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. xvi.

† Socrates. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. viii.

‡ Socrates. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. vi.

virtues which adorned the believer faithful to his calling. But the church did not arise before him as a splendid, beautiful idea. He saw a vast multitude of people distinguished by a particular faith; and singularly excited by the principles thence derived to dare and to suffer, and to act with superiority to every ordinary, worldly consideration, even when greatly wanting in the spiritual qualities of the more perfect of their brethren. To an eye so keen and observant as his, the spectacle of such a people, aroused to conflict, must have been terrible indeed. He had lived long enough to know that no earthly force could subdue the Christian : that privations and tortures tended but to bring out into bolder development the inward strength with which he was endued ; and that if ever the fable of the hydra was fulfilled, it was when the tyrants of Rome endeavoured to destroy the followers of Jesus by the sword.

Impressed with strong convictions of the necessity of both caution and energy in dealing with a people like this, Constantine resolved to throw the responsibility of preserving peace on the Christian clergy. For this purpose he took measures to assemble representatives of the church from all parts of the world. So extensive a design had never yet been formed ; the earlier rulers of the empire having had no idea of the nature of Christian unity ; and the Christians themselves thinking but of the inward, secret, and spiritual communion which united them to each other, and to their God and king.

From Nicomedia, in Bithynia, where he had fixed his residence, Constantine sent letters to the bishops of every province in the empire, summoning them to assemble in council in the neighbouring city of Nicæa.

The call thus made was readily obeyed. More than

three hundred bishops left their distant homes to assist in determining what was the real creed of the church. The number of presbyters and deacons was still greater; and never before had the oneness of the body of Christ, the hidden power and principle of union, been shown on so grand a scale, or with such splendid proofs of its reality. Constantine neglected nothing which could contribute to the efficiency of the measures which he had adopted. Ample provision had been made for the reception and maintenance of the venerable strangers at Nicæa; and even for their journey to that city.* Nor was it to the clergy only that the summons was sent to attend the council. Several of the most distinguished dialecticians of the age were called to the assembly; and thus the choicest specimens of piety, experience, and learning; the noblest representatives of the mightiest institution which the world had ever seen, prepared themselves for the conflict with the subtlest of heresies, and the boldest of schisms.

A. D. 325. On the day fixed for the opening of the assembly, the members of the council were admitted into the ample hall of the palace prepared for their reception. When the numerous body of prelates, and others, were seated, a signal announced that the emperor was near at hand. As he entered, the whole assembly arose. The splendour of his appearance, clothed as he was in purple, and covered with jewels, dazzled the eyes of the spectators, and for the moment they were awed at finding themselves in the presence of the conqueror and sovereign of the world. But the demeanour of Constantine, whether affected or

* Eusebius. *De Vita Constant.* lib. iii. c. vi.

real, was characterised by deep humility and thoughtfulness. He surveyed the vast assembly of Christian pastors and teachers with apparent feelings of surprise and veneration. Having approached the upper part of the hall, a low seat, covered with gold, was placed for him; but he refused to sit till the aged bishops expressed their desire that he would do so. This ceremony having been gone through, the prelate, who occupied the place on his right hand, turning to the emperor, delivered a short, complimentary oration. At the conclusion of this speech, Constantine himself addressed the assembly. He spoke of the meeting of so many bishops and ministers of the church as the fulfilment of his most anxious prayers. The dissensions of the church of God were to him, he said, more grievous than any species of war or contention. It had been his fondest wish, when finally triumphing over his enemies, to be able to unite with those whose cause God had avenged by his sword, in one common joy and thanksgiving. But the unlooked-for intelligence had been brought him of their mutual enmity and dissensions. Anxious to find a remedy for so great and melancholy an evil, he had, without delay, called around him the venerable men who were now present. "And I experience," he added, "the profoundest pleasure in beholding you thus assembled; nor will my hopes be disappointed, if I see you joining together in one mind, and mutually resolving to establish peace and concord, as it behoves the consecrated ministers of God."*

Constantine spoke in Latin, but his words were immediately translated by a Greek interpreter. So little effect, however, did his address produce upon the meeting, that

* Eusebius. *De Vita Constant.* lib. iii. c. xii.

he had no sooner finished, than the most discordant feelings manifested themselves among several of the prelates. One party accused the other of fraud or error, and was immediately answered in the same tone of controversial hatred. Propositions were made, but were as instantly lost in the general confusion; and a sad surprise it would have been for the first Christian emperor to behold such passions existing among the followers and ministers of Jesus, if he had not already learnt by his converse with the world, and his acute observance of human nature, what a vast distinction must ever prevail between those who only embrace doctrines, and those who are converted, enlightened, and vivified by principles.

Not allowing any reproof, or sign of impatience to escape him, the emperor tranquilly listened to the hasty and confused arguments pressed tumultuously upon his attention. When opportunity was given him, he mildly represented to the disputants the necessity of forbearance and concord. Shamed or affected by the demeanour of Constantine, and the good sense of his words, the members of the council became more tranquil; and order was sufficiently restored to enable them to consider the object for which they were convened.

But it was not the influence of Constantine only which ultimately conferred upon this assembly its proper power and dignity. There were present with those, who allowed themselves to be so easily stirred by unworthy passions, many of the purest and most devoted servants of Christ. Such was Athanasius, then only a deacon in attendance on the bishop of Alexandria, but so soon to become the leader of the orthodox. Such too were St. James, bishop of Nisibis; Paul of Neocæsarea, the nerves of whose hands had been burnt with a red-hot iron in the late persecu-

tion; Spyridion, a bishop of Cyprus, celebrated both for his severities and his comprehensive view of the gospel; Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem, and Paphnutius.

Arius had been examined as to his doctrine previous to the general meeting of the council. The answer which he gave to the inquiries made, satisfied the fathers that they must entertain no hope of his retractation.* When called before the assembly, he delivered, in presence of the emperor, the same confession as that which had already so afflicted the friends of peace and true religion. One of the letters of Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, was read; and was found to contain no less error than the statement of Arius himself.† Some attempt was made by the party which had embraced the new heresy to defend its author, and they obtained, for a time, attention to their representations and arguments. But they are said to have contradicted each other; and when the assembly, consisting of more than three hundred‡ bishops, and other Christian ministers, proceeded to determine the formulary of confession, only five of the whole number present hesitated to adopt the creed proposed for their signature. These five were Eusebius of Nicomedia; Theognis of Nicæa; Maris of Chalcedon; Thæonas of Marmarica; and Secundus of Ptolemais. Eusebius of Cæsarea, the historian, at first refused to sign the confession, but the next day accepted it. His state of mind was evidently that of many others who adopted the formulary. Atha-

* Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. xvii.

† Theodorus. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. vi. The epistle referred to is generally supposed to be that which Eusebius wrote to Paul of Tyre, as reported by Theodorus.

‡ Athanasius says in one place that three hundred and eighteen were present.—Ad Afros Epis. Op. t. i. p. 892.

nasius plainly intimates that those of the Arian party who thus conformed to the decision of the council, only gave their assent from the dread of losing their station and preferments.*

The Creed drawn up by the council of Nicæa was substantially the same as that which we now repeat in the service of the communion.† On the word *Homoousion*, translated, *of the same substance*, in reference to the Son of God, rested the main burden of the dispute. The sincere and earnest believers in the divinity of our blessed Lord, spoke plainly and distinctly of his oneness with the Father; of his eternal glory and divinity. When the partizans of Arius and Eusebius saw that they were in danger of excommunication, if their faith should be proved heterodox, most of them made a bold effort to satisfy the demands of the council without, in reality, forfeiting their own opinions. But it was felt by the fathers of the church that any obscurity in a matter of such vast importance ought not to be voluntarily allowed. And here it may be useful to observe, that the great teachers of religion thus assembled together, were not pretending to explain mysteries, or to frame dogmas, but to declare the faith of the church of which they were ministers. When, therefore, they sought for expressions, which had not hitherto

* De Decretis Nicænæ Synodi. Op. t. i. p. 210. Socrates. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. viii.

† We believe in one God the Father, Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is of the substance of the Father: God of God, light of light, true God of true God, born, not created, *homoousion*, that is, of the same substance: by whom all things were made, both which are in heaven and which are in earth. Who for us men, and for our salvation, descended,

been employed in describing the doctrines of the gospel, it was not for the purpose of introducing new views, but to declare fully and definitely their own belief in those which were as old as the gospel itself. Thus the word *Homoousion* was forced upon them by the insincerity of their opponents. While they were anxious to save the church from a mixed and doubtful faith, so did they desire to proclaim their own acceptance of primitive doctrine in all its fulness and simplicity. Instead then of being charged with the invention of subtleties, or with delighting in curious distinctions, the fathers of Nicæa deserve reverence for having taken the surest method that could be employed for the silencing of sophistry. They wished to make their meaning clear. This could not be done without words. The words of Scripture are doubtless the best that can be used to describe what Scripture contains. But creeds describe not the contents of Scripture, but what men have learnt from the study of Scripture. They are intended to set forth truths as already ascertained and acknowledged; not as requiring consideration and proof.

To find fault, therefore, with phrases or expressions introduced into a creed, because they are not found in the Bible, is to dispute the propriety of introducing creeds at all. This, indeed, may be done, and without any manifest unfairness or irreligion. But the ground thus taken was not that of the Arians; nor is it that which their suc-

and was incarnate, and was made man; suffering and rising the third day. He ascended into heaven; and will come again to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Spirit.

This was the Creed; but an anathema was added, directed against those who said that there was a time when Christ was not.

cessors have seemed anxious to occupy. The term *Homousion* described exactly the belief of the orthodox in the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. They justified their sincerity and honesty by using a word so plainly expressive of their doctrine. The word *Trinity* was introduced for similar reasons, and was criticised with similar severity; but in both cases the use of the descriptive terms thus adopted has tended more than any other human means whatsoever to preserve the primitive doctrine unimpaired—to separate it from the wild inventions of the heretic—to defend it against the daring attacks of the sceptic.

Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis, and Maris, three out of the five who had refused to sign the formulary when first proposed to them, would not sacrifice their ease and dignities to their opinions, and at length added their names to the other members of the council. In the case of Eusebius, Constantia, the emperor's sister, is said to have used her influence to overcome the doubts of the heterodox prelate.

Arius, by the sentence of Constantine, was banished into Illyria. His associates were doomed to the same punishment; and to prove the detestation in which his heresy was held, the various works which he had written were condemned to the flames. By a still more striking exercise of power, condign punishment was denounced against those who should retain any of these works in their possession; and the sentence passed upon Arius and his present companions was extended to the whole of those who had been excommunicated by Alexander. Secundus and Theonas, the only two who remained constant to their first refusal to sign the creed, were sent into

banishment with Arius; and the orthodox had the gratification to find that the emperor was ready in all things to adopt their views and recommendations.

The more important object of the council having been secured, it was enabled to turn its attention to other matters, which, though of less consequence, were yet closely connected with the tranquillity and welfare of the church. A schism had existed for many years, the author of which was Meletius, bishop of Lycopolis, in Thebais. The crimes or follies of this man had rendered him obnoxious to ecclesiastical punishment, and the bishop of Alexandria had formally deposed him. But the sentence thus pronounced was treated by Meletius with haughty contempt. He assumed a higher degree of independence and authority than that to which he had formerly aspired; and for a considerable period he exercised the dangerous power which belongs to the leader of a party, which owns no law but the will of its chief. The council manifested its fear of Meletius, and its hatred of his errors. It allowed him to retain his title as bishop, while it condemned the whole of his proceedings. But this temporizing was productive of no good fruit. Meletius acted in opposition to some of the main provisions of the assembly; and his party only yielded eventually to the action of times and seasons, which gradually deprived it of its vigour and pretensions.

Easter and its observances being still the subject of dispute, the council availed itself of the power which it possessed to determine the questions which had so long agitated the church. In several provinces of the East, that is, in Syria, Cilicia, and Mesopotamia, the festival was kept on the fourteenth day of the month, without

regard to the particular day of the week.* In all other portions of the church—in the West, in the North, and South, and in some parts of the East, it was never celebrated but on the Sunday. Great confusion arose from this diversity of practice; and as the unity of the church was happily in those days considered a matter of supreme importance both to the souls of men and to the glory of God, it disturbed many pious minds to think that, while one set of believers were humbling themselves to the dust, meditating on the agony of their Lord, another were already celebrating, with expressions of triumphant gladness, the event of his resurrection.

After a long and earnest consultation on the subject, the assembled bishops, representing the whole Catholic church, came to the conclusion that Easter ought to be kept on no other day but Sunday. A decree was immediately drawn up, and assented to, as well by the Orientals, as by the bishops of the other provinces. St. Athanasius† has directed especial attention to the different phraseology employed by the fathers on this subject, and on those which respected matters of faith or doctrine. Thus, in the latter case, the council simply says, “We believe,” in order to show that the creed was no invention or new rule of their own; but the well-established belief of the church at large—the faithful representation or summary of apostolic tradition. With respect to Easter, they say, “It is decreed:” with respect to doctrine, “The Catholic church believes.”

At a subsequent meeting of the council twenty other

* Athanasius. *De Synod. Op.* t. i. p. 719. Eusebius. *Vita Constant. lib. iii. c. xix.*

† *De Synod. Op.* t. i. p. 719.

canons were made and confirmed. Most of these referred to irregularities then existing, and afford melancholy, but indisputable evidence of the corruptions which were gradually undermining the foundations of ecclesiastical discipline. The sixth of these canons is important in an historical point of view, as showing the authority granted to the bishops of certain great sees, as Alexandria and Antioch, in the same manner as to the bishop of Rome:—“Let the ancient custom be preserved in the regions of Egypt, Lybia, and Pentapolis, that the bishop of Alexandria have authority over all those parts; for such is the custom in the case of the bishop of Rome. So also as to Antioch, and the other provinces, let the rights of the several churches be preserved.” The seventh canon directs, that, according to custom and ancient tradition, the bishop of *Ælia* should be honoured; the dignity of the metropolis being at the same time preserved. By the fifteenth canon, the translation of bishops, priests, and deacons, from city to city, is forbidden. By the next, presbyters or deacons, leaving their proper diocese, are not to be received into another without the consent of their bishop. In the seventeenth canon, mention is made of many of the clergy who were known to be engaged in the practice of a shameful usury. The council decreed, that if any were henceforward found guilty of such practices, or of engaging in any species of business, they should be degraded. Other canons respect the Novatians and Paulicians, both of which sects are treated with great charity; the clergy of the former being offered admission into the church by imposition of hands; and even those of the latter, having submitted to baptism, receiving the same invitation to join themselves to the great body of believers.

The labours of the council being brought to a close, a synodal letter was addressed to the church of Alexandria, and to all the faithful in Egypt, Lybia, and Pentapolis.* “It pleased the whole assembly,” says this epistle, “to anathematize the impious doctrine, the words and blasphemies of Arius—blaspheming the Son of God, and asserting that he sprung from nothing, and that there was a time when he did not exist; that he was capable of choosing vice or virtue according to his will; and that he was a creature. All these things, the impiety and foolishness of this opinion, the most sacred synod has condemned and anathematized.”

Constantine also addressed a letter to the churches. In this epistle he speaks of the anxiety which he had felt to see “the most blessed people of the Catholic church enjoying one faith, and exercising a pure charity and faithful devotion to God, the ruler of all.” The dispute respecting Easter appears, from what is said by Constantine, to have been regarded as only inferior in importance to that which regarded the errors of Arius. It was iniquitous, he says, that dissensions should exist on a matter of such vast consequence, and that any portion of the people of Christ should appear to associate themselves with the basest of his enemies. “Our Saviour established one day of deliverance, the day, that is, of his most sacred passion; and he ordained also, that there should be one Catholic church, the members of which, though dispersed in various places, are nourished by one Spirit, even by the Divine will.”†

The respect which Constantine had manifested towards the clergy, when they first assembled in Nicæa, was not

* Theodoritus. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. 9.

† Ibid.

diminished by the opportunity which he had had of judging of their character and acquirements. This affords an incidental and valuable proof of the superiority of the greater number to the low vices by which some of their brethren were disgraced. Constantine knew well how to estimate the virtues and follies of mankind; and when he treated the ministers of the gospel, at the close of the council, with increasing regard and veneration, he bore indisputable testimony to the purity and elevation of their dispositions.

A grand feast was given in the imperial palace on the anniversary of his accession to power.* At this entertainment the fathers of the council were the principal guests. Their reception corresponded to the admiration with which Constantine contemplated their piety and wisdom. A body of guards and other troops stood arranged about the gates of the palace,† and deeply were some of the venerable men affected as they passed through the long line of soldiers, when they recollected how, a few years before, these same guards had watched them while they were undergoing tortures, or had stood round the scaffold or the burning pile of the most beloved of Christians. When reclining on the same seats with the emperor himself; when beholding the splendour of the hall which had been prepared to receive them, and the sumptuous hospitality of the entertainment, so great was the contrast between the present and the past, that, at one moment, they regarded the whole as a dream; and, at another, as a bright image of the reign of Christ.

When the prelates rose to take their leave of Con-

* July or August 25, A. D. 325.

† Eusebius. *Vita Constant.* lib. i. c. xv.

stantine, he presented each with a magnificent gift; and, assuring them of his high esteem and affection, entreated them to preserve unbroken that peace and concord which seemed to be so happily established by the decisions of the council. Nor was the imperial bounty confined to the venerable men assembled at Nicæa. Constantine recollected the various classes of believers who stood in need of support; and he generously appointed pensions to be paid to the virgins and widows who then formed a constituent part of every Christian church; and to such of the clergy as were reduced to poverty.*

The Council of Nicæa effected objects of the highest importance to the interests of the gospel. It established the rule of faith; that is, it proclaimed to the vast body of believers throughout the world, that, at the close of three hundred years, the primitive creed, the fundamental truths of the gospel, occupied the same place in the church as at the first. That creed, those truths, had been subjected to every species of trial; and the men to whom they had been entrusted as a sacred deposit, were characterised by every variety of disposition. Some were weak, others strong: some nobly unselfish; others base, avaricious, and sensual. But full of human infirmity, as were many of the preachers of Christianity; shaken as the system of ecclesiastical rule and discipline often was by the vices of its administrators, still was the life of heavenly doctrine preserved; still did it permiate through the enlarged and enlarging frame of the universal church.

This unchanging, unfailing character of the faith once

* Eusebius. *Vita Constant.* lib. iii. c. xxi. Theodoretus. *Hist. Eccles.* lib. i. c. xi.

delivered to the saints, was a subject of deep and rejoicing thought to the stronger spirits among the people of Christ. But with every increase in the number of professed believers, fresh proof was given of the obscurity and uncertainty which attended the confession of many converts to the gospel. Heresy and schism seemed to have a growth proportionable to that of the church; and this could only be accounted for by the fact, that vast numbers of Christians had but a vague apprehension of the doctrines of their religion, and might, therefore, be easily induced to listen to the reasonings of those who pretended to set them forth in a surer and clearer light.

A form of confession had existed from the apostolic times; it was the venerable creed upon which the faith of the apostles themselves had left its own bright and perfect image. As long as Christians preserved the simplicity proper to their religion, the creed thus handed down to them was amply sufficient for all the purposes of a rule of faith. But their departure from the principles essential to the belief which they professed created new necessities, in the same way as a similar departure from the simplicity of nature, producing disorders in the physical frame, gives birth to new appetites and new wants.

The formulary determined upon at the council of Nicæa was an answer to the demands of the church, struggling with unexpected deficiencies and unlooked-for opponents. It was not offered to believers as the result of critical learning, or as the contribution of able minds bent on discovery; but as the body of truth known to exist in God's word, and to the existence and perfection of which it was the purpose of the council to bear its fullest and clearest testimony. The additional words

and phrases used, might be regarded as but introduced to aid the understanding of the shorter and simpler form of confession ; or to determine the sense in which it had ever been understood by those well instructed in Christian doctrine.

But whatever may be our views on this subject, certain it is, that the council of Nicæa conferred the greatest of benefits upon sincere and humble inquirers after truth. It was not to be supposed that the haughty minds which felt no love for the gospel itself, would derive much advantage from the exhibition of its doctrines in a form distinct and authoritative. By their acceptance of a creed, they would put a yoke upon their own speculative spirits, and reduce them to a level, in respect to faith, with the humblest of understandings. In the case, therefore, of those who were willing to receive Christianity only so far as it agreed with their private judgment, the great work performed at Nicæa in the name and spirit of the church, could produce little benefit. But with reference to those more consistent disciples of Christ, who tremblingly inquired after the truth, while surrounded by numberless disputants and bold teachers of error, the decisions of the council were of infinite importance. They learnt, therefrom, what was the mind of the church to which they had joined themselves ; what was the foundation upon which its system of teaching rested ; what was the object of the faith which justifies ; what the truth, which quickens and illuminates.

The result of the labours performed by the council, derives its value from the fact, that it was the decision of the whole body, and that the assembly itself was the representative of the whole church. But while as to the sentence pronounced upon heresy, or as to the formulary

of faith set forth, we must look to the council only as giving them authority ; we may, in other respects, profitably consider the character of some of those remarkable men, whose individual ability and virtues contributed most largely to the efficiency of the assembly.

Among those who deserve this meed of affectionate regard on the part of posterity, none can claim a higher place than Athanasius. This really wonderful man was born at the end of the third century, in the city of Alexandria.* His parents were Christians, and his education is said to have been such as was eminently calculated to render him a faithful servant of the Saviour. While he was still a youth, Alexander, then only a presbyter, took him to his house, and instructed him in the knowledge of divine things, and especially in the most profitable methods of studying Scripture. Nor was it from Alexander only that he received assistance in these pursuits. Some of the holiest of the martyrs imbued his mind with the grand and solemn lessons of spiritual experience. Lawyers and philosophers contributed their share to the cultivation of his powerful mind ; and he acquired that various knowledge, which enabled him, in after years, to perform so effectually the duties of a Christian advocate.

Athanasius was not twenty years of age when he determined to retire from the world, and seek the solitudes of the desert. His wish to see and converse with St. Anthony was his main motive for resolving upon this step. Nothing opposed the fulfilment of his design ; and hastening to the retreat of the venerable hermit, he spent with him a considerable period, employing days and nights in those severe exercises of devotion, which rendered him so

* Vita S. Athanasii. Op. T. I.

capable of struggling, at all times, against the temptations of the world. But his ability was too well known to allow of his remaining in the desert. Alexander, on being elevated to the bishopric, called him back to the city, and ordained him deacon. The troublous period which followed, afforded many painful occasions for the exercise of his ability. He was the best qualified of the clergy to defend Alexander against the accusations of Arius. His acute and accomplished mind enabled him to detect and expose the sophistries of the heretic. When the council of Nicæa was summoned, he prepared himself to accompany Alexander ; not so much as a deacon, as a devoted friend, or loving son. So well was he fitted to perform the part which he had undertaken, that all accounts agree in attributing to him the most important share in the confutation of Arius and his followers.

A few months only were past after the council of Nicæa, when Alexander, finding himself at the point of death, named him as his successor. The feelings which had led Athanasius in his youth to seek a life of solitude, now induced him to flee from the dignity which he knew would bring with it so many cares and temptations. But Alexander continued to call upon him with his dying breath. The people and clergy were equally anxious to see him elevated to the episcopal chair; and after some months of delay, he was constrained to become bishop of Alexandria.

No sooner had he received consecration, than he hastened with devout zeal to examine the state of religion in his diocese. The Meletians and Arians were still powerful and active, especially in the churches of the Thebais. To suppress their movements, Athanasius visited the districts most disturbed by their machinations. It

might have been hoped that the earnestness with which he addressed these enemies of truth and peace ; the mingled tenderness and severity which marked his exercise of authority, would have proved successful. But his labours produced no effect. Schism and heresy continued triumphant among large bodies of the people ; and their leaders resolved upon overcoming Athanasius by some of those unworthy arts so commonly employed by men of low but subtle minds against the great and good.

Constantine was surrounded by Arians, the disciples and allies of Eusebius of Nicomedia. His acquaintance with the doctrines of the gospel was not sufficiently mature to enable him to see through the sophistry of his advisers. Their arguments and representations had an appearance of fairness which greatly affected him ; and he was induced to dispatch an order to Athanasius, insisting upon his immediately readmitting Arius to the communion of the church. The consequence to Athanasius of a refusal, was to be expulsion from his diocese. But Athanasius calmly replied to these threats, that the Catholic church could never hold communion with men who had declared war against Jesus Christ. Constantine read the answer of Athanasius with attention and respect. He understood the value of his courage and firmness, and desisted for the time from the measures which he had been persuaded to adopt.

But Eusebius was not discouraged. By inducing the Melitians to unite with him in his plot, he obtained new resources ; and Athanasius was immediately assailed with charges which exposed not his dignity merely, but his liberty and life to danger. Thus he was accused, in the first place, of having led the people of Egypt into the payment of a new tax ; and, among other things of more

or less importance, of having sent a chest full of gold to some insurgent who pretended to the empire; and of having murdered Arsenius, bishop of one of the churches in the Thebais.

Wild and improbable as were these accusations, they obtained the notice of Constantine. Knowing little as he did of the real character of Athanasius, he expressed his horror and indignation, that a man capable of such crimes as those laid to his charge, should occupy so high a post in the Christian church. Eusebius artfully suggested that he ought to assemble a council to try Athanasius; and he proposed that this meeting should be held at Cæsarea in Palestine, and consist of certain bishops of the East.

The emperor did not at first discover the injustice of this proposal; and it was only after Athanasius had refused to attend a synod so constituted, and in such a place,* that he began to suspect any unfairness in his advisers. Having ordered the meeting, therefore, to be held in some other city, Tyre was chosen as proper for the purpose. The council assembled in the August of 335. Athanasius attended the summons in company with forty-nine bishops, his friends and colleagues. Sixty other bishops also arrived from various parts of Egypt, Lybia, and the East. The bishop of Antioch, himself an Arian, was chosen president. Dionysius, an officer of the imperial court, and also a partizan of the Arians, was intrusted with the duty of preserving order in the assembly. Eusebius of Nicomedia occupied a conspicuous place among the judges; and everything had evidently been so arranged as to secure the condemnation of Athanasius.

* Eusebius, the bishop, was known to be closely connected with Eusebius of Nicomedia, and the Arian leaders.

Numerous were the crimes of which he was accused. Murder—treason—sacrilege. His own caution and ability, and the witnesses which were at hand, enabled him to meet at the instant every charge brought against him. The bishop himself, whom Athanasius was said to have murdered, appeared in the assembly; and nothing remained for the members of the council but to effect by force what they had vainly endeavoured to accomplish under an appearance of law.

By an act of the grossest violence and injustice, the council, in spite of the refutation which Athanasius had given to the charges of his enemies, pronounced upon him sentence of deposition, and he was commanded not to appear again in the city of Alexandria. But during these proceedings, he had effected his escape from Tyre; and was on his road to Constantinople, where he laid before the emperor a full statement of the machinations of his opponents, and of the falsehood of their charges.

Constantine listened patiently to these representations; and expressing indignation at the proceedings of which Athanasius complained, instantly sent messengers to Tyre, directing the bishops who formed the synod to attend him at Constantinople. But these determined enemies of Athanasius had time on the way to prepare an accusation, which they knew would sound more probable in the ears of the emperor than others of a different character. Refraining, therefore, from their former topics, they declared Athanasius guilty of having threatened to prevent the transport of corn from Alexandria to Constantinople. This was a serious matter, and the emperor contemplated the possibility of such a proceeding with extreme alarm. Athanasius employed the most forcible arguments to prove the utter improbability of his having used the expressions

attributed to him. But he argued in vain. The fears and jealousies of Constantine were not to be overcome so easily as the false charges of his enemies. He was ordered into banishment; and this sentence was considered, mild, in comparison with that which his supposed crime deserved.

The city of Treves was the place appointed for his residence. He there found many friends. Constantine the younger had the command of the forces in the district, and he treated the exiled prelate with kindness and respect. The bishop of the diocese also manifested towards him the most brotherly affection; and nothing was wanting to his contentment but the opportunity of continuing his labours for the defence of the gospel, and its pure, and unadulterated doctrines.

CHAPTER IX.

ARIUS AND HIS PARTY—DEATH OF ARIUS.—CONSTANTINE'S SUCCESSORS—JULIAN—THEODOSIUS THE GREAT—SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL—GREGORY NAZIANZEN—ST. BASIL.

WHILE Athanasius was thus driven from his diocese, Arius and his party became every day more formidable to the orthodox. In Alexandria, the people remained generally faithful to their exiled bishop; but the doctrines of Arius were now publicly preached in some portion or the other of every province in the East. Constantine allowed himself to be deceived into the belief that the Arians were the real sufferers in the present troubles, and that their piety and virtues rendered them worthy of most ardent sympathy. Eusebius of Nicomedia, and the other Eusebius of Cæsarea, are commonly spoken of as chiefly disposing him to take this favourable view of the Arians. But they were themselves aided by a most powerful ally. Constantia, the sister of Constantine, and widow of Licinius, had been early induced to listen to the arguments of the Arian clergy. When seized with her last and mortal sickness, she paid a profound and solemn attention to these heretical teachers; and urged by them, she sent for her brother, and entreated him, as he loved truth and justice, to refrain from persecuting so holy a man as Arius. The emperor yielded to these supplications of his dying sister. Arius was recalled, and Athanasius, as we

have seen, had to endure a most unjust punishment for refusing to admit him to communion. The dedication of the church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem took place immediately after the proceedings against Athanasius in the council of Tyre. Eusebius and his colleagues hastened to be present at the ceremony. Their influence was sufficient to impose upon others of the clergy who had come to Jerusalem. They accordingly held a synod; and Arius soon after appeared among them bearing a letter from the emperor. He had succeeded in persuading Constantine that what his sister had said was worthy of implicit belief; and that the decisions of the Council of Nicæa were founded on a misapprehension of his real statements and opinions. After a general confession of his faith* in one God, the Father Almighty; in the Son, begotten before all ages, God the Word, by whom all things were made both in heaven and in earth, and in the Holy Spirit, he adds, "This is the faith which we have received from the Holy Gospels, our Lord thus teaching his disciples, 'Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' And if we do not thus believe, and thus truly receive the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost as the whole Catholic church, and the Holy Scriptures teach, all which we believe, God shall be our Judge both now and hereafter."

This statement was followed by a strong appeal to the emperor's clemency. "We are ecclesiastics," said Arius and his companion Euzöius. "We hold the faith, the

* In this he was joined by the presbyter Euzöius, by whom he had been accompanied to Constantinople. Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. lib. ii. c. xxvii.

mind, and doctrine of the church, and of the Holy Scriptures, and we, therefore, pray that by the exercise of your peacemaking and devout piety on our behalf, we may be united to our mother, the church; and that, superfluous disputes and questions being put aside, we and the church mutually cultivating peace, may pour forth our prayers for the prosperity of the empire, and the happiness of the world at large."

If we recollect how little accustomed Constantine had been to religious inquiry, or to the language in which theologians express their opinions, no surprise can be felt at the course which he took on this occasion. He could not discover any important distinction between the doctrines of Arius and those of the Council of Nicæa.* The bold appeal which was made to the belief of the church, the mention of the three persons of the blessed Trinity, the tone of devotion in which the whole was expressed, all tended to deceive an unpractised and, as Constantine's was, at least in these matters, an ingenuous mind. He felt, as a monarch, sincerely anxious to preserve tranquillity, and when he meditated upon the gospel as the best calculated of all systems in itself to promote peace and unity, he regarded the disputes of its teachers with no less sorrow than surprise. Not able to discover the vast importance of those points which Arius cunningly represented as nice and trifling distinctions, he attributed the troubles in the church to a jealous or too curious spirit in its rulers. He, therefore, readily acceded to the wish of the petitioners; and Arius presented a letter to the synod at Jerusalem, in which the emperor declared his wish that the assembled bishops would examine his case, and con-

* Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. lib. ii. c. xxvii.

sider whether he had not been condemned by the personal envy or hostility of his enemies, or whether, if really guilty, he ought not to be restored upon his repentance, and confession of a true faith.

The very circumstance of the emperor's writing such a letter would have been sufficient to incline many of the clergy present to look with a favourable eye on the claims of Arius. Constantine's own wishes might easily be discovered, and it has been but in few instances that a powerful monarch has intimated his opinions without being able to render them respected. With the addition, therefore, to their former influence, which this letter of the emperor gave them, Eusebius and his associates found it an easy task to rule the synod according to their own views and designs. Arius and Euzöius, with the whole of their followers, were finally readmitted to communion. The former hastened back to Alexandria; and his supporters, in the mean time, took such measures at Constantinople as seemed best calculated to secure the permanency of their triumph. News having arrived that Egypt was in a state of agitation, owing to the return of Arius, the emperor consented to summon another counsel at Constantinople, and to invite Arius to attend and plead his cause in person. Alexander, the aged bishop of Constantinople, foresaw how much evil and excitement would attend the appearance of Arius. He entreated the emperor and the prelates who surrounded him, to reconsider the proposed measure; and for the sake both of religion and peace to prevent the public entrance of Arius into the city.

But the wish of Alexander was effectually opposed. Preparations were made for the arrival of Arius in a manner which plainly proved how

anxiously the event was regarded by Eusebius and his colleagues. Alexander spent the interval in prayer and fasting. He trembled for his people; for the purity of their faith—for the safety and tranquillity of his church. Arius, as proposed by his friends, was to be solemnly received by the congregation, when assembled at their Sunday devotions. On the preceding Saturday, several of his supporters proceeded to the church of St. Irene, where Alexander was engaged in prayer, to desire him to admit Arius to communion. To this the aged bishop replied, that he could not commit so great a sin, as to receive into the church one who had openly warred against its pure and sacred doctrines. "Then," answered the Arians, "as we brought him hither in spite of your opposition, so will we see him, whatever your resistance, joining to-morrow in the service of the church."

Alexander, seeing how vain it was to reason with his antagonists, or to appeal to authority, returned to his devotions, and awaited, in tranquil dependence upon God, the events of the morrow. With one companion only to join in supplication with him, he passed hour after hour, praying at the altar for the divine mercy and interference. The prayers so offered up were, say the ancient historians, signally answered. Arius, in proceeding to the church, was seized with a sudden sickness, which obliged him to leave the company by which he was pompously attended. His friends awaited his return in the forum. Their patience being exhausted, they sent some of their party to seek him. To their distress and terror he was found a corpse!

The death of Constantine happened the following year. He was baptized only a short time before his decease.*

* By Eusebius of Nicomedia. Eusebius. *Vita Constant.* lib. iv. c. 61.

Whether his delaying thus solemnly to take upon himself the obligations of the Christian covenant arose from fear or doubt; whether it should be attributed to the awful sense which he entertained of the nature of baptism; to the dread which he felt of approaching it unworthily; or to the low views which he entertained of Christian rites, and Christianity itself, till he felt his end drawing near; to which of these reasons we should look for an explanation of Constantine's conduct in this important matter, must ever remain doubtful. But his baptism at the last, plainly shows, that whatever his previous views had been, he did not continue to regard Christianity as only valuable for its moral or political influences. Had this been the case, he would have contented himself with some calm, complacent acknowledgment of the beauty of its precepts, and the sublimity of its doctrines. He would not have desired to be purified by the mystical washing away of sin; he would not have felt, that to be buried with Christ in baptism, was to secure a resurrection with Christ; that to be born again of water and of the Spirit, was to become a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Instead, therefore, of regarding the baptism of Constantine on his dying bed as indicating previous hypocrisy, it ought rather to be viewed as a valuable illustration of the gradual development of a divine principle of faith and conviction, in the heart of a man, whose particular state and natural character, were singularly adverse to the direct or immediate appeals of Christianity. The baptism of Constantine, was indeed one of the noblest testimonies which had been given to the truth of the gospel, as viewed and examined by those who lived only three hundred years after its first establishment. That

he was not baptized at an earlier period after his adoption of Christianity, affords, it may be allowed, a proof of his low spiritual condition; but his baptism when he was dying shows, still more strikingly, his actual conversion; his recognition of the value of the gospel; his experience of its power upon his soul, at a moment when all the strength of his inner, spiritual being, was engaged in the contemplation of eternity.

Constantine directed that his three sons should share his dominions between them. War and tumult attended this arrangement, and Constans, in the end, succeeded in possessing himself of the whole of the western provinces. These he held for ten years, when he was conquered and slain by Magnentius. The remaining brother, Constantius, taking arms against the usurper, and proving victorious, became master of the entire empire. His reign was brief and inglorious, and terminated just at the moment when he was about to engage in battle with his cousin, the celebrated Julian, who, by the death of Constantius, obtained undisputed possession of the imperial throne.

Of the three sons of Constantine the two who ruled in the West were firmly attached to the doctrines of the Nicene council; while the other was no less favourable to the Arians. Constans no sooner found himself master of the West than he recalled Athanasius from exile, and proposed to take measures for the general restoration of religious peace. But the two parties remained as hostile as ever. Each made an appeal to Julius, bishop of Rome. It was resolved that a synod should be held in the West; and to this Athanasius willingly assented. But the Arian party soon discovered that its interests would be little forwarded by such a measure. Antioch, therefore, was fixed upon as the place of meeting; and more than ninety

bishops met in that city to draw up a new confession of faith, according to the principles of Arius.

No fewer than four forms of confession were presented in this assembly. Each corresponded closely in appearance to that of Nicæa. But the studious rejection of the word *consubstantial*, proved that an important distinction existed between the opinions thus set forth and those of the Nicene fathers. That such was the case, Athanasius and his associates did not hesitate to proclaim; and if other proofs had been wanting, the sentence of deposition which the synod pronounced upon the former would have been sufficient to prove its real sentiments and intentions. Gregory of Cappadocia was nominated to the see of Alexandria, thus declared to be vacant; and Athanasius, knowing the fury of his enemies, felt that his safety depended upon instant flight. Taking ship, he sailed for Rome; and Julius, on his arrival, immediately resolved to afford him the opportunity of confronting his persecutors.

But Eusebius and his party had no inclination to expose their proceedings to the investigation of the church in the West. The summons issued by Julius was answered by vain excuses; and when the synod in which Athanasius was to defend himself assembled, it was found to consist of only fifty bishops, drawn together for the simple purpose of doing justice to their faith, and to the noblest of its champions.

Athanasius remained some years at Rome.* During

* Some writers have asserted, that it was during this stay at Rome that Athanasius composed the creed attributed to him. But this account is generally rejected. The Athanasian Creed was not known till long after the death of Athanasius; and it is supposed to have been composed by Vigilius Tapsensis, an African bishop, at the close of the fifth century. Vigilius lived during a frightful Arian perse-

his absence, Alexandria was exposed to every species of agitation. Gregory of Cappadocia trembled for his usurped dignity. He, therefore, entreated the emperor to lend him his support. This request was answered by the introduction of a body of troops into the city, which exercised the most wanton cruelty against every advocate of the Catholic doctrine. Property was seized and destroyed. Aged confessors and venerable bishops were subjected to imprisonment and torture. The very spirit of civil disorder appeared to wait on religious hatred and fanaticism.

In the year 345 another synod was assembled at Antioch. This assembly consisted chiefly of those who, while they rejected the Nicene term, *consubstantial*, as showing the oneness of the Son with the Father, did yet desire to acknowledge his divinity. They were accordingly described as Semi-Arians; and some of them approached so nearly the orthodox profession, that it required little, when the heat of controversy was over, to induce them to embrace the authorised creed of the church. The confession drawn up at the time referred to, was formed of the creed adopted in the preceding synod of Antioch, and of a long and careful exposition of its principal articles. In this formulary, expressions are employed in direct opposition to the errors of Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, and other heretics. Each particular is very fully declared, and hence the formulary has been called the Long, or Prolix Confession; and its authors assigned as a reason for its length,

cution, and is said to have subscribed the name of Athanasius to several of his writings. The Council of Autun, held in the year 670, spoke of this creed, and directed that every presbyter, deacon, sub-deacon, &c., should read it with the Apostle's Creed, or be censured by the bishop.—Bingham. Antiquities, B. x. c. iv. s. 18.

the anxiety which they felt to leave nothing obscure in the statement of their belief ; nothing which might leave a doubt on the minds of the western bishops of their actual agreement with the Catholic church.*

After the creed itself comes the following declaration : “ They who affirm that the Son exists from nothing, or that he was begotten of any other substance, but not of God ; or that there was a time or age when he did not exist ; are accounted as aliens from the Holy Catholic Church.” So also is it said, “ Although, according to Scripture, we confess three persons, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, yet do we not thereby make three Gods. For we affirm, that there is one God, perfect in himself, unbegotten ; without beginning, and invisible ; God, the Father of the only-begotten, and who alone enjoys existence from himself alone, and imparts to all other beings the existence which they possess. Yet although we affirm that there is but one God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not therefore deny that Christ is God, before all ages, as the disciples of Paul of Samosata. For we know that, though he is subject to the Father, even to God, he is, by nature, being begotten of God, perfect and true God : not from man made God, but from God made man for our sake, and never ceasing to be God.”

Eusebius of Nicomedia, now raised to the see of Constantinople, was chiefly concerned in the composition of this creed. The title of Eusebians, therefore, has been commonly given to those who embraced the views which it exhibits. It required, indeed, the practised eye of an Athanasius to discover the defects which lay concealed

* Socrates. Hist. Eccles. lib. i. c. xix.

amid the orthodox acknowledgments of Christ as God, and as the only-begotten of the Father. But no approach to conciliation could satisfy men who believed that the glory of the gospel was depending upon their stern adherence to the truth which they felt and proclaimed. The only apparent remedy for the disorders which hence arose, and which became every day more injurious to the peace of the empire, was solemn inquiry and debate. Yielding, therefore, to the entreaty of some of the bishops, Constans and his brother Constantius determined on summoning a synod at Sardica.

The assembly thus summoned consisted of the representatives of the churches both in the East and West. Exaggerated accounts are given of the number who attended the meeting, and while some writers contend that above three hundred prelates were present, others reduce the number to less than a hundred. But the hope entertained by the emperors was utterly frustrated. The eastern bishops, deeply infected with semi-arian principles, would not listen to the demand which Athanasius made to be heard in person before the synod. His supporters from the West were equally resolute in the support of his just demand. Two parties were thus immediately formed; and while the latter carried on their debates in Sardica,* the others retreated to the neighbourhood, and there assumed the character of an independent synod.

Claiming authority to pass decrees, and to draw up confessions of faith, the Sardican Council, as it was called,

* The venerable Hosius, bishop of Cordova, was the president of the council, so far as it consisted of western bishops, or of those who supported Athanasius. They also drew up certain canons and a creed, to confirm that of Nicæa. Theodoret. Hist. Eccles. lib. ii. c. viii.

published an epistle, addressed to the churches throughout the empire. In this letter they declared the purport of their proceedings; spoke of the bishops whom they had deposed, among whom were Athanasius, and the bishop of Rome himself; and desired the churches to hold no further communion with them, either personally or by letter.

The confession of faith drawn up on this occasion was, like those preceding it, but little different from that of the orthodox. Some apology indeed might be found for many of those who joined themselves to Eusebius, while they had no desire whatever of impugning the authority of the church, or corrupting its doctrines. The errors of Sabellius had obtained a strong hold in minds which shrunk with dread from every thought or word which derogated from the glory of Christ. There was danger, consequently, that the true doctrine of the Trinity might be lost in the obscurities of Sabellianism; and that the splendours which human ingenuity and conceit delighted to pour around the Son, might render it difficult to discover his distinct existence and personality. Marcellus, bishop of Ancyra, employed a language which could scarcely be distinguished from that of Sabellius; while Photinus, bishop of Sirmium, following on the same path, compelled even his own party to pronounce his opinions unsafe and unorthodox.*

Constantius, we have seen, was a devoted champion of the Arians. His first efforts, on becoming master of the empire, were employed in favour of his partizans. He

* In the synod held at Milan, 346. Five years after sentence of deposition was pronounced against him by the Eusebians at Sirmium.

desired to see them as powerful and respected in the West as in the East. To accomplish this wish, he summoned a synod first at Arelate,* in 353, and two years afterwards at Mediolanum.† Persuasion and violence, were employed in these assemblies to compel Liberius, the bishop of Rome,‡ and other powerful prelates, to consent to the condemnation of Athanasius. Such was the power exercised by the emperor at Arles, that the pope's legate, a venerable old man, bishop of Capua, found himself unable to resist the storm. To the grief of his brethren, he signed the sentence against Athanasius; and the western church seemed, for the moment, to lay prostrate beneath the influence of Arianism. This was felt to be still more the case when, in the Council of Milan, Constantius haughtily commanded the assembled bishops to sign the decrees which had been passed by the associates of Eusebius. On their representing that it would be contrary to the canons of the church to do so, he exclaimed, "My will must be taken for the canons of the church. The bishops of Syria are content to do so: and if you be not, then consider yourselves deposed and banished."§

Sorrowful, but not alarmed, at this outbreak of passion, the prelates who had most earnestly contended for the orthodox doctrine, raised their hands to heaven, and solemnly conjured the emperor to recollect that he was invading the kingdom of Christ, and usurping an authority which belonged only to God. This appeal but further enraged Constantius. He drew his sword, and

* Arles.

† Milan.

‡ Liberius.

§ Athanasius. ad Monachos. Op. t. i. p. 363.

brandishing it in the face of the bishops, threatened them with destruction if they continued to resist his commands.

The sentence of banishment was immediately put in execution, and messengers were sent to Rome, to desire Liberius to give his assent to the proceedings at Milan. Valuable presents, as well as persuasions, were employed to win over Liberius to the imperial party. But he remained firm to his declaration, that he could not agree to pronounce Athanasius guilty of crimes and errors from the charge of which he had been so often acquitted.

Not long after this, Liberius was apprehended by the ministers of the emperor, and carried to Milan. There, in a conference with Constantius, he repeated his sentiments respecting Athanasius and his doctrines. The dispute ended as might have been expected. Liberius was sentenced to banishment; and in a few days was sent into Thrace.

The following year a synod was held at Sirmium. Like those which preceded it, it served but to support the Eusebians, or Semi-arians, against the orthodox. Under the pretence, however, of great fairness, the members of the assembly determined that neither the word *Homoousion*,* nor the other term lately introduced, *Homoiouision*,† should henceforth be used. In the confession then drawn up, Christ was described as begotten of the Father; God of God, light of light, the nature of whose generation could only be comprehended by the Father himself.‡

* *Of the same substance.*

† *Of like substance.*

‡ Athanasius. De Synod. c. viii. Op. t. i. p. 722.

But when this formulary was presented to Hosius for his signature, he rejected it, as involving a doubt respecting the Nicene confession. His answer to the commands of Constantius was noble and pathetic. But the emperor was resolved to accomplish his design. Hosius, now nearly a hundred years old, was summoned to Sirmium. There Constantius and his ministers employed numberless arts to induce him to sign the confession. For many months the aged bishop resisted both threats and entreaties. Violence was then resorted to ; and the scourge and the rack furnished the emperor with a more terrible argument than the privations of banishment. Worn out with pain and fatigue, Hosius at length yielded. He signed the document presented to him, and was immediately sent back to his diocese.

A more melancholy instance of human infirmity has rarely been exhibited than that of Hosius. In his earlier years, he had shone forth as a noble example of Christian devotion. The middle period of his course was distinguished by acts of heroism and resignation, which rendered him one of the most conspicuous of those venerable men who acquired, in times of persecution, the lofty title of confessors. Such, too, was his reputation for wisdom ; for experience and ability, that his brethren, whatever their rank or genius, readily assigned him the chief place in all great and important assemblies. But now, when full of years and honour, when regarded, by both clergy and people, as a sublime example of perseverance and consistency, the mere weakness of human nature exposed him to the most lamentable reverse of his spiritual condition as a minister of the church of Christ. Impatient of restraint, or shrinking from the suffering of some few hours, he purchased repose for the brief rem-

nant of life which remained to him, at the expense of whatever was best and brightest in the whole of his past career.

Nor was this all. He became, it is said, a persecutor of those whom he could not induce to exhibit like weakness with himself. Constantius had issued orders, that if any of the Spanish clergy should refuse to hold communion with Hosius, in consequence of his signing the decree of Sirmium, banishment should be the punishment of the offender. Gregory, bishop of Illiberis, was sufficiently bold to treat this decree with contempt. Hosius instantly directed the civil governor to proceed against him. The magistrate hesitated to act, till sentence of deposition had been pronounced upon the bishop. Hosius showed no backwardness to take this step ; but Gregory appealed to heaven against his persecutors ; and tradition says, that Hosius, at the moment when he was about to pronounce the sentence, was seized with apoplexy, and fell dead from the tribunal on which he was seated.*

Liberius proved himself no less weak than Hosius. After having been three years in exile, he listened to the overtures made him by the emissaries of Constantius. Another formulary of faith had been drawn up at Sirmium.† He was summoned to that city ; and there, in the year 358, set his name to the documents laid before him, and was restored to his liberty and station.

The party of Eusebius, Arians, and Semi-arians, were

* If the circumstances here spoken of be literally true, yet it is evident that the admirers of Hosius attributed them solely to the weakness of extreme old age. Athanasius and others speak of him as the most venerable of men.

† Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. lib. iv. c. xv.

now in the enjoyment of unlooked-for power and prosperity. But their exaltation, happily for the orthodox, produced the usual effects of undeserved success. During their conflict with Athanasius, and while the issue of the struggle was altogether doubtful, they consented to hide the differences of opinion which prevailed among them. But now that they were at ease, each division of the party began to assert its right to a distinct hearing, and to that eminence of station, which its supposed purity of doctrine justified it in demanding. The Semi-arians, under Basilius, bishop of Ancyra, obtained the confirmation of their opinions in a synod held in that city, in the year 358. This was in opposition to the Arian synod, held at Sirmium the preceding year. Hence a permanent schism was created. Aëtius, a deacon of Antioch, a bold and active disputant, contended for the unmodified system of Arius. In this he was joined by Acacius, bishop of Cæsarea, and other men of rank and influence. As they denied the propriety of describing the Son either as of the same, or of like substance, with the Father, they were called Anomœans.

But the disputants were not satisfied with assuming descriptive titles, or imposing them in scorn upon each other. They longed for power ; and synods were held at Ariminum in the West, and at Seleucia in the East, to determine which should finally have the pre-eminence. In the former synod, the orthodox at first so far prevailed, as to be able to resist the attempts to introduce any other creed but that of Nice. Their opponents, however, were too well practised in the arts of controversy to be so easily defeated. By an appeal to the emperor, they obtained time ; and at last succeeded in completely baffling the efforts of the opposite party to escape

from the labyrinth of subtleties in which they involved them. But it was the triumph of the Semi-arians, and not of simple Arianism, that was thus gained. In the synod of Seleucia, a violent dispute arose between the Arians, Aëtians, and Semi-arians. It ended in the triumph of the last; and a new form of confession was drawn up, from which all the controverted terms respecting the nature of the Son were studiously omitted. "We believe," says this creed, "in the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ: begotten before all worlds; the Word, which is God; the only begotten of God; the light; the life; the truth; the wisdom and the power; by whom all things were made both in heaven and earth, visible and invisible. We believe, that in the end of the world, he took flesh of the holy Virgin Mary, for the abolishing of sin, and that he was made man, and suffered for our sins, and rose again and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; whence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead. And we believe in the Holy Ghost, whom our Lord and Saviour called the Comforter, and whom he promised to send to his disciples after his departure, and whom he sent accordingly. And by him he sanctifies all those in the church who believe; and are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall teach anything besides this faith, the Universal Church doth utterly reject." Acacius and his party found themselves anathematised by the synod in its adoption of this creed. Employing, therefore, their political influence, they induced the emperor to summon another assembly of the clergy. In this meeting Aëtius and Eunomius took the lead; but to their own injury, the former being convicted of advancing opinions which not even the more than

Semi-arian sovereign could be induced to tolerate. Other synods were held after this; but to as little purpose; and when Constantius died, the acutest politician might have been perplexed in attempting to determine which of the factions was the most deserving of his support.

Julian hated the gospel; and had no wish to see its professors exercising that mutual forbearance and love, which would have rendered them too strong for the most subtle of his attempts against the church. He openly declared himself tolerant of all religions. While, therefore, he professed the most devoted zeal for the ancient heathenism, and worshipped the gods whom thousands of the people, and those of the humblest classes, rejected with enlightened scorn, he pretended to leave the Christians to themselves; to let them settle their own disputes; and to make the most they could of their own wisdom and their own strength. But this, in reality, was nothing more than the shadow of toleration. He exercised the whole of his power, as a sovereign, and employed all the instruments which authority could secretly place in his hand, for the purpose of undermining the very foundations of the Christian church. He allowed the bishops who had been exiled to return to their dioceses; but he deprived the church of its revenues, under the pretence that religious men could find their way to heaven the better the less they had to burden them. So, too, he permitted the Christians to profess whatever creed they pleased; but he prohibited them from attending the schools of philosophy, and from cultivating secular learning; leaving them to depend upon the resources which they had represented as sufficient for their enlightenment. He acted, in short, as an enemy who was ready to forego the momentary satisfaction of revenge, for the more lasting accomplishment of its de-

signs. He had suffered, as the suspected and hated child of Constantine's brother, the most cruel treatment at the hands of his cousins. Their Christianity appeared to his disordered vision as the source of all his miseries; and when he unexpectedly attained to power, he knew no greater pleasure than that of opposing the growth of a system, which he could only contemplate in the mirror of his own indignant feelings.

But many as were the evils which the Christians suffered under Julian, they derived some important benefits from the liberty which they enjoyed through his indifference as to their disputes and divisions. It is evident that the Arian party had been perpetually indebted to the interference of the emperor, for the partial and temporary triumphs which it enjoyed. When the orthodox, therefore, had a fair field open for the struggle with their opponents, it was soon seen on which side the truth, virtue, and power of the controversy lay. There being no weapon but that of the word and Spirit, which the new rule of warfare would allow, the factious disputants who had ever looked to the sovereign, or some minister of state, to deliver them from danger, saw themselves utterly unprepared for the warfare when left alone with the enemy.

One of the first results of this state of things, was the restoration of Athanasius to his see. He had spent a considerable period with the hermits of the desert. The solitudes of the remote wilderness afforded him the only home in which he could be safe from the pursuit of his enemies. Little more than three hundred years had passed since the birth of Christ. But the hatred which controversy engenders was already full grown among his followers; and the actual interests of religion and humanity seemed to be regarded as of less worth than the

prize of power and authority dependent upon the issue of the struggle. Athanasius found in the desert a class of men, whose simple devotion of their souls to God afforded the most remarkable contrast to the political and speculative character of theological disputants. He there met with the aged St. Anthony, and others who had lived long enough in the desert to become familiar with all that is most solemn and important in the growth of a soul conversing only with heaven. The intellectual state of such men must have been strangely different to that of Athanasius. While his mind was furnished with the richest stores of human learning, and disposed, by constant habit, to examine and dispute, theirs must have been devoid of all the common intelligence of the times; must have wanted the knowledge which the world accounted most valuable, and every characteristic of a keen and penetrating ingenuity. Instead of this, they possessed a deep, reposeful, unquestioning faith. They loved, and walked with God. To those who sought them, they could offer no instruction like that given by the great masters of scholastic learning. They could answer no inquiry in the language of a subtle philosophy. The only value which their discourse possessed, was that which it derived from its profound spirituality.

Nothing can be better calculated to exalt our notions of Athanasius, than the delight which he felt in converse with these inhabitants of the desert. His elevation to the highest rank in the church, his vast learning, his habits of controversy, the tendencies of a fervent, bold, and even haughty nature, vexed by continual injuries, had not been able to overpower the simple love of holiness in his soul. This it was which led him to sympathize with the people of God, wherever found; which

gave both power and light to his mind; and a value to his controversial writings which, without the spirit thus breathed into them, would never have exhibited the peculiar grace and earnestness by which they are distinguished.

Athanasius was received, on his return to Alexandria, with every demonstration of honour and affection. He immediately commenced those reforms in his church which were rendered necessary by the violence and licentiousness of George of Cappadocia. Affairs soon presented a bright and hopeful aspect. The people admired Athanasius for his courage and brilliant virtues. The clergy venerated him for his profound wisdom and holiness. But the popularity which he enjoyed excited the indignation of his enemies. Julian was persuaded to believe that he acted as an enemy to the state; and he gladly seized on the pretence thus afforded him, to revenge the cause of idolatry, which it was the well-known wish of Athanasius finally to exterminate. An order was sent to the governor of Alexandria, directing the immediate expulsion of the bishop. If this should be resisted, a heavier punishment was to be inflicted. Athanasius knew the peril to which he stood exposed, and that the malice of his enemies would scarcely be satisfied with his exile. Taking a boat, therefore, he instantly proceeded up the Nile towards Thebais. But some of his faithful friends saw that preparations were being made to pursue and bring him back. They hastened after him, and came up with his boat in time to advise him to land, and hasten as speedily as he could across the desert. But he refused, observing, that he would rather meet his pursuers, and let it be seen that he who was with him was greater than he who was against him.

Directing, therefore, the boat to be turned, he was on his way back to the city, when, soon after, the vessel approached in which were the officers sent to apprehend him. Not suspecting who it was, or that it could be Athanasius, whom they supposed to be far up the stream, they inquired of the crew if they had seen him on the river. "He is at no great distance," was the answer given; and the officers, encouraged at the intelligence, spent no further time in questioning the strangers, but rowed with fresh speed towards Thebais.

Athanasius, in the meanwhile, pursued his course unmolested. On reaching Alexandria, he sought the house of a friend, and there lay concealed till another change of events enabled him to return to the exercise of his functions.

Idolatry found in Julian an enthusiastic champion. The forsaken and dilapidated temples were restored to their ancient splendour. Sacrifices again bled on the altars. The air was filled with the odour of incense; and the gorgeous processions of early times reawakened the people to the fabled glory of by-gone ages and vanished deities. The philosophers who had proudly resisted the gospel as a rival to their pretensions, beheld with rapture the efforts made to restore a religion so much more flexible in its character than that of Jesus Christ. Libanius, the most celebrated heathen of the age, and other teachers of the same class, spoke of Julian as the friend of truth and humanity, and as destined to restore the empire to that state of grandeur and vigour from which it had of late so greatly declined.

It was a refined policy which left the Christians at liberty to pursue their own course, and for the several parties into which they were unhappily divided, to strive against each other with as much rancour as they pleased.

Persecution, it was now commonly understood, did but serve to bring out all the virtues of the human heart to support the sufferers. Christianity, left to itself, Julian believed, would soon yield to the ordinary influences of the world—of time and change. He desired, therefore, neither to stimulate the enthusiasm of its professors by exposing them to danger, nor to allow them the enjoyment of those helps and encouragements afforded them by the late emperors. In carrying out this latter part of his design, he cut off all pensions and allowances which had been granted to churches or their ministers. He rendered the clergy subject to all the obligations of public service like the laity;* and he prohibited Christian teachers from lecturing on any of the great heathen authors—as Homer, Herodotus, and other ancient writers—under the pretence that they who despised the religion of those wonderful men, ought not to be allowed to derive wisdom from their genius. “It is absurd,” he said, “to find them teaching what they believe not. If they consider the ideas of the ancient poets and sages worthy of respect, let them imitate their piety towards the gods. But, if, on the contrary, they believe that they were deceived on the most important of all subjects, let them be contented to expound Matthew and Luke, and leave the classics to those who understand them better.” He did not, however, hesitate to confess, that his chief motive for passing this law was to prevent the Christians from citing the errors of the ancients, in their arguments against the truth of heathenism.† While Julian thus employed the most rigorous measures for the suppression of Christianity, he sought, at

* Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. 5.

† Theodoret. Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. 8.

the same time, to improve the character of the old religion of the empire. For this purpose he wrote to the priests and officers employed in the restored temples, exhorting them to cultivate that strictness of morals which became their office; to see that the people advanced in the love of truth and virtue; and that benevolence was exercised towards the poor and sick.* Compelled to bear testimony in these respects to the conduct of the Christians, he pointed them out as examples which, in such matters, he desired the pious worshipper of the gods to imitate. We could not have a better incidental proof of the comforting truth, that, though the great mass of Christ's people had declined from that pure and lofty spirituality for which they had been distinguished in the primitive times, they were still characterized by virtues which proved how powerfully divine grace operated upon their general temper and feelings. With all Julian's affected contempt for the Galileans, as he loved to call the Christians, he saw clearly that, whatever was done against them, they must eventually triumph in the conflict with heathenism, unless heathenism could render its votaries as wise and virtuous as the gospel made the followers of Jesus.

The determination of Julian not to attack the Christians by any act of open violence, was often put to a severe trial. It was not always that he could conceal the pain which he suffered in suppressing his rage at their manifest contempt of heathenism. On one occasion, some soldiers, in the performance of an act of military homage, had unwittingly taken part in some ceremony which their companions described as idolatrous. Full of terror and

* Sozomen. Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. 16.

disgust, they hastened to the palace of the emperor, cast the largess which they had received at his feet, and proclaimed that they were ready to die, so that they might but wash out with their blood the stain which they had contracted by their act of idolatry. Julian instantly ordered them to execution; but just as the headsman had lifted his axe, a messenger arrived in breathless haste from the emperor, and directed their immediate liberation.

From whatever motive Julian acted when he thus overcame his passion, and resolved not to sacrifice the lives of his subjects to his superstition, he did not take care to place the officers of his government, or the people generally, under the control of the same feelings. In many parts of the empire, reasons were invented for the apprehension of Christians, and for their formal condemnation. Some were charged with secret treason; others with open rebellion; some with destroying the images of the gods; others with polluting the temples. Their trial before a weak and prejudiced magistrate, whose whole ambition it was to please the emperor, was only a wretched mockery; and many, consequently, there were who perished by the most cruel deaths, only because they were Christians; while Julian himself was pretending to allow them as much peace and liberty as he accorded to the most favoured heathen. It was at Antioch that his patience seems to have been most painfully tried. He visited that city on his journey into the East. The season of his arrival was that in which the melancholy rites paid to the memory of Adonis, and the magnificent festival of Apollo, had been for so many ages observed with splendid pomp and devotion. Julian looked eagerly for the signs of that mystic worship which was so intimately associated in his mind

with the glory of Antioch, its laurel groves, and solemn oracles. He took his place by the altar to which were to be brought the appointed sacrifices—the grateful offerings of a city beloved of the gods. But no victims appeared. No crowd of worshippers was heard joining in melodious hymns and choruses. The temple and its environs were almost deserted. When Julian, who stood prepared to perform the office of supreme pontiff, impatiently asked the attendants where were the victims for sacrifice, they timidly answered, that none had been prepared. Indignant at the contempt thus thrown upon the rites of idolatry, and the cause of which he now began to understand, Julian spoke with bitter contempt of the people and city of Antioch, so fallen, as they seemed to him, from their former religious glory.

The neighbouring cities seemed to regard the fate of Antioch as sealed, by the plain indications which the emperor gave of his anger at its neglect of the gods. To preserve themselves from the storm thus apprehended, they hastily revived all the old practices of heathenism; repaired the temples; offered up sacrifices with extraordinary assiduity; fed the fires on the altars with the richest incense; and addressed the restored idols as if they really believed, that the fate of the empire and of the world could be determined by those senseless objects of their senseless devotion. There was still the other method whereby to secure the favour of the emperor; and that was the persecution of those whom nothing could induce to betray their religion. Throughout Syria both the magistrates and the populace were ready to inflict tortures upon the Christians on the slightest pretensions; and rarely did they fail to discover the existence of some circumstance which was deemed a sufficient reason for

accusing them of disaffection to the state. In Alexandria, the wicked and turbulent bishop, George of Cappadocia, fell, though not a martyr, yet a victim to the rage of the multitude.

It was Julian's policy to set one party against the other; and, by exalting those that were depressed, to lessen the power of the more powerful and numerous. Hence he readily afforded his assistance to the Jews; and to inspire them with a high notion of his respect for their religion, and at the same time to prove his contempt for Christian prophecy, he determined to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem.

No circumstance in ancient history is attended with more mystery than this. It is related, that the workmen whom he employed having made some progress in laying the foundations, were suddenly compelled to suspend their labours by the breaking forth of a body of flame. When their alarm a little subsided, they returned to their work, supposing that the phenomenon might be confined to the spot where it first appeared. But they in vain removed from one part of the trench to the other. Wherever they dug the fire broke forth upon them; and they were at length obliged to give up the attempt to lay the foundation, many of the observers, both Jews and heathens, confessing, that the wonder could only be attributed to the interference of the God of heaven.

It has been the wish of sceptical reasoners to throw a doubt upon the whole of this narrative; and either to set aside the reality of the occurrence, or to account for it by mere natural causes.* But in this case, as in so many

* The learned bishop Warburton has written a very remarkable and interesting treatise on this subject. *Works*, vol. viii.

others, the reasoning of the disbeliever involves more difficulties than the faith of the Christian. It is far easier, that is, for a candid mind, to acknowledge the interference of divine power in the support of divine truth, than to suppose that it was chance or accident only which saved it from the scorn of the adversary.

Julian had resolved to humble for ever the power of Persia. The advanced state of the season obliged him to remain at Antioch till the end of winter. During this period he beheld, with increasing disgust, the manners of its inhabitants, and their hatred to his gods. So openly did they proclaim their contempt, both for his person and his faith, that in their Saturnalia the people were heard singing aloud abusive ballads, describing his beard, and his other affectations of philosophic gravity. This ridicule he bore with as much indifference as he could; and whatever might be his motive, it was certainly to the credit of his self-command, that instead of taking vengeance on the rude multitude, or those by whom they were urged on, he contented himself with writing a harmless satire* in answer to the abuse so plentifully and fiercely heaped upon him.

It is probable that Julian's feeling of resentment against Antioch was more satisfied by the discovery which he made of the state of the people and of the church, than by the bitterest expression he could give to his anger or contempt. With all the zeal which had been manifested for the honour of Christianity, the state of public manners was characterized by the effeminate love of ease and luxury, rather than by principles proper to a spiritual profession; and while this inconsistency fur-

* The Misopogon.

nished him with abundant materials for the satire in which he delighted to indulge, so also might it suggest the hope that Christianity was declining in life and power, and might again leave the dominion of men's minds to heathen tradition and philosophy. Scarcely a motive, indeed, was wanting to induce Julian to wish himself emancipated from the restraints which he had voluntarily placed upon his anger. The splendid temple of Daphne, with its celebrated image of Apollo, was reduced to ashes by the act of a Christian incendiary. It was a crime against the laws. Some of the clergy were put to the torture, but one only suffered death; and the emperor blamed his officer for inflicting the punishment.

It is impossible to tell what might have been the final results of this struggle in Julian's heart, between his natural feelings of resentment and his desire to act with the calmness and moderation of a philosopher. The doubt may be entertained whether the hostility which was thus denied its ruder satisfaction, might not, in the end, have produced evils far more destructive to the church, though less terrible to the existing generation, than any which had followed in the train of the most sanguinary persecutor.

But Providence ordained that the church should not have to endure, for any lengthened period, a state of things so strange as well as perilous. Julian led his army into the heart of Assyria. Conquest attended upon his steps. He began to feel that he was not only emulating the fame of Alexander, but performing deeds which merited equal renown. On entering the dominions of the Persian king, the same success crowned his bold designs. Already he saw the unbounded riches of the East within his grasp. His imagination placed before him the palaces

of Ctesiphon, and the gorgeous thrones of its princes. He believed that it required but the continued valour of his troops, and his own skill as a general, to make him master of the kingdom whose splendour seemed so unworthily to rival the nobler glories of Rome.

Urged forward by his hopes and his ambition, Julian allowed no obstacles to oppose his march. To prove his confidence of victory, he burnt the fleet which had hitherto followed the army with supplies; and when disappointed in his attempts upon Ctesiphon, consoled himself with the idea that he might employ his time, till joined by reinforcements, in successfully invading some remoter province. But he had trusted too much to his generalship. He found himself in the midst of a country which seemed to involve him every step he set in the intricacies of a labyrinth. The guides in whom he confided proved faithless. His army was threatened with famine; and it soon became evident that some desperate movement must be made to deliver it from impending destruction.

Julian shrunk from no toil or danger which the circumstances in which he was placed required him to encounter. He led his troops to an attack upon the enemy, which, after a sanguinary conflict, ended in the complete defeat of the barbarians. But the flying foe poured showers of darts upon the impetuous Romans; and among those whom they reached with deadly aim was Julian himself. Tradition relates, that as his blood gushed from the fatal wound he caught it in his hand, and flinging it in the air, exclaimed, "Galilean, thou hast conquered!"* By another account, he is described as passing his last moments in calm, philosophic discourse, imitating, by his

* Theodoret. Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. xxv.

tranquil contemplation of death, the sublime example of Socrates, and breathing forth sentiments which it is difficult not to ascribe, in some degree, to the unacknowledged influence of his early Christian education. If, indeed, we may give credit to the narrative which exhibits him resigning life with so much dignity, and leaving the world as if rejoicing to change its pomps for the purer glories of heaven, it is impossible not to lament, that a mind capable of such noble aspirations, should have been marred and perverted by the ill-judged severity of those Christian preceptors to whom its cultivation was at first intrusted.

The death of Julian left the throne of the empire vacant. It was immediately filled by the election of Jovian,* a general, whom popular manners and good sense, rather than actual eminence among his brethren, recommended to the favour of the army. His first duty was to extricate the troops, to whose choice he owed his sudden elevation, from their present difficult position. This he effected, and on his route towards Constantinople, he had the satisfaction to find that his known faithfulness as a Christian served to support rather than weaken his claims to the obedience of his subjects. At Antioch he was visited by Athanasius; and he rejoiced to exchange for the blessing of the most venerable of Christ's ministers, his imperial assurance of devotion to the church and its ancient doctrines.

By the return of Athanasius to Alexandria, the ecclesiastical affairs of Egypt exhibited a better promise of tranquillity than they had presented for many preceding years. The same happy change attended the support which Jovian afforded the church in other provinces. His reign was terminated by his sudden death before he

* Theodoret. Hist. Eccles. lib. iv. c. i.

could reach Constantinople. But his successor, Valentinian, showed no less favour to the Christians; and it is recorded that in his time, such was the decline of heathenism, scarcely a trace was to be found of the old superstitions except in fields and villages.* One of the sons and successors of this emperor, the pious Gratian, cast aside the robes of his office as Pontifex Maximus, and transmitted the title with a so purposely diminished splendour, that the next possessor of the imperial throne allowed it to fall for ever into forgetfulness. By this, the last bond of union between the sovereign and the ancient religion of the Roman was destroyed. The emperor had neither robe nor title to which the associations of idolatry gave lustre; and it became his interest, as well as duty, to blend his own dignity as speedily and firmly as he could with the living spirit of evangelical faith.

Theodosius enjoyed for some years but a portion of the imperial inheritance. It was not till the year 392 that he became sole monarch of the vast dominions which had descended to him from the Cæsars. His zeal for Christianity then induced him to take vigorous measures for the final suppression of idolatry; and he published an edict whereby he forbad, on pain of death, the repetition of any of those rites which had so long disgraced human nature, and offended the majesty of God.

But while only Emperor of the East, he anxiously sought to save the church, not from the attacks of heathenism only, but from the spirit of discord which was still raging in its bosom. The Arians and Semi-arians were engaged in a strife which had so much the more of rancour from the recollection of the parties that

* Hence the heathen began to be called *Pagans*, from a Greek word signifying a village.

they originally belonged to the same family. Other titles, as Eunomians, Macedonians, Apollinarians,* were now also heard, as representing particular divisions of the larger sects, and which had been derived from the names of their respective founders, or leaders. The slightest metaphysical difference of thought, the merest shadow of a variety in the expressions employed in controversy, was sufficient to excite a dispute in these days; and it was rare, indeed, that the dispute did not prove a fruitful mother of sects or heresies.

Near sixty years had passed since the first general council was held at Nicæa. During the interval, events had occurred as perplexing as they were injurious to the Christian church. The wisest of its members knew not what measures it might be safe or proper to pursue, in suppressing the disorders which seemed every day to increase. Toleration was the remedy which political considerations suggested to the emperor; but while the state tolerated all sects, the sects could not be persuaded to tolerate each other. No sooner, therefore, did the prospect exist of a settled government in the empire, than the sovereign formed the plan of again throwing the responsibility of preserving religious peace on the church itself.

Macedonius, while patriarch of Constantinople, had not only been an open partizan of the Semiarians, but contributed his share to the increase of heresy. Denying the personality of the Holy Spirit, he described it as an emanation from the Deity, diffusing itself through the uni-

* Apollinaris was bishop of Laodicea in 371. In theorizing on the nature of Christ, he contended that the divine nature in the Redeemer was the same to him as the soul to a mere human being; and that, consequently, he had no soul, properly so called.

verse. His deposition, effected by rival heretics, left him at liberty to speak more openly than before on the novel doctrine which he had taught. The error soon took its place among the others of the day; and when the friends of pure Christianity surveyed the general state of religion, the heresy of Macedonius was one of those which appeared to require the most vigorous exercise of power for its suppression.

No slight measure of success had attended the struggle of the orthodox against Arianism and its kindred errors. During the reign of Valens, the brother and associate of Valentinian, Arianism again raised its head; and found in Auxentius, bishop of Milan, a fervent and powerful supporter. Valens himself was deeply infected with the error, and soon after his accession to power began to persecute the orthodox. St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, took a conspicuous part in the controversy; and, by his masterly management of the argument with Auxentius, constrained him to acknowledge the divinity of Christ, and his consubstantiality with the Father.* In a council held at Lampsacus, in 365, the same doctrine was formally acknowledged; and in another, held at Rome, by order of pope Damasus, five years afterwards, it was solemnly declared that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, and of the same substance. A large body of the Semi-arians, in the meantime, visited Rome, and in a conference with pope Liberius, declared their entire readiness to accept the creed of the church as published at Nicæa. Valens beheld these movements with indignation. Eu-

* St. Hilary had suffered a long exile in the reign of Constantius, and was probably at this time again in danger of having to pay a similar penalty for his fidelity. But he returned to his diocese, and died at Poitiers in 367.

doxus, the patriarch of Constantinople, was a firm supporter of Arianism; and it was from him that Valens had derived his religious creed. Many were the barbarities of which the emperor and his ministers are accused. One instance of cruelty and treachery is spoken of to which it is difficult to give credence. A number of presbyters, distinguished for their orthodoxy, were sent to sea in a vessel which had been filled with combustibles, and was soon after seen enveloped in flames; the destined victims in vain endeavouring to escape from the devouring element.*

It may be questioned, to what degree reliance should be placed on some of the accounts given of the proceedings of Valens. Frequent cruel and gross injustice was manifestly committed against the orthodox by his command; and the church found itself delivered at his death† from troubles which threatened to suspend for many years the employment of its powers for the happiness and salvation of mankind.

The attachment of the emperor Gratian to the orthodox party served in some degree to repair the injuries inflicted by Valens. But it was for Theodosius to enjoy the distinguished credit of re-establishing the church in peace and security; and of defining, by the decree of another Œcumenical Council, the faith upon which it is founded, and in which alone it can possess life and permanency.

Arianism soon ceased to use the boastful language which it employed, when enjoying imperial patronage. But while this gigantic heresy declined in power, other forms of error, the offspring of troubled times, might be seen more distinctly, and be better compared with the

* Theodoret. Hist. Eccles. lib. iv. c. xxiv.

† A. D. 378.

pure principles of evangelical religion. Hence the dogma of Macedonius respecting the Holy Ghost, now seemed to demand the most serious attention of the church; and to be the main obstacle still remaining to the final triumph of the true faith.

But considerations of doctrine were not the sole
 A. D. 381. cause of the anxiety which Theodosius felt to assemble the heads of the church in a general council. Disputes of the most dangerous character existed respecting the election, or ordination, of some of the bishops occupying the highest rank in the church. Among these was Maximus, patriarch of Constantinople. This unworthy possessor of so great a dignity had professed philosophy as a Cynic; but was charged with vices as little becoming the character of a philosopher as of a Christian. Having by a mingled exercise of cunning and ability obtained the favour of Gregory Nazianzen, lately elected by the orthodox to the see of Constantinople, he made use of the influence so acquired to set aside his patron, and to raise himself to the patriarchal throne. In times of confusion he might have continued to support his usurped dignity. But the return of tranquillity was fatal to his interests. The council was assembled at Constantinople; and by its first act, Maximus was deposed, and the devout and enlightened Gregory elevated in his stead.

The see of Antioch was equally the subject of contention. It was held by the venerable Meletius, but not without rival pretenders to its possession. Appointed for his years and virtues president of the council, he died soon after the commencement of its proceedings. Gregory strongly advised that the most pacific measures might be taken for suppressing the troubles at Antioch;

and that the rival bishop, who was greatly advanced in age, might be allowed to remain undisturbed. But this advice was violently opposed; and the mild spirit of Gregory shrinking from the rising tumult, he insisted upon resigning his dignity, and leaving others to allay the threatened agitation. His farewell discourse, delivered in the great church at Constantinople, afforded a magnificent proof of his powers of mind—of his eloquence and his virtues.

Gregory's resignation was followed by the election of Nectarius,* an old man, not yet baptized, and whose whole life had been passed in civil employments. He was, however, distinguished for his virtues and his sweetness of disposition. Theodosius desired the bishops to give him a list of those out of whom he might choose a fit successor to Gregory. Influenced, no doubt, by the representations made him, he fixed on Nectarius; and the aged man, having been baptized, and still wearing the garment of a Neophyte, was immediately consecrated bishop, and placed on the patriarchal throne.

The council was now at liberty to examine the tenets of the Macedonians. No slight indulgence had been shown the chiefs of the party. Thirty-six bishops, professing the disputed doctrine, were admitted to the assembly; and persuasion, as well as argument, was employed to induce them to lay aside their speculative errors, and adopt the creed of the church. But the word *consubstantial* was as odious to them as to the Arians; and, retiring from the council, they formally announced to their followers their final rejection of the Nicene faith.

By this act of the Macedonians, the council was set

* Theodoretus. Hist. Eccles. lib. v. c. viii.

free from any further obligation to speak in the language of tenderness or conciliation. Its best efforts had proved vain; and it thus became its bounden duty, for the sake of the gospel and the church, to state plainly and fully the common belief of God's people respecting the nature of the Divine Spirit. Having, therefore, declared the Macedonians guilty of heresy, the fathers of the council proceeded to draw up a creed, making only such additions to that of Nicæa as the late controversy had rendered necessary. In the formulary thus framed, the generation of Christ, and his consubstantiality with the Father, were spoken of as in the ancient creed; but to the sentence, "Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate," is added, "of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary; and was made man; and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; and was buried, and rose again the third day. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he will come again with glory to judge the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Vivifier, proceeding from the Father;* who is to be worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son; who spake by the prophets. And in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins: we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."†

* The words "and the Son" were not added till about two hundred years after this period, and their introduction was attended with many disturbances in the church. The Greek or Eastern church has never received this statement of the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son as well as the Father.

† Routh, Script. Eccles. Opuscula. t. ii. p. 382.

This authoritative statement of the faith of the church, in the latter part of the fourth century, is of great value to every Christian who is capable of meditating on the history of his religion, and the course of events by which the church has been tried and sifted. The Nicene creed was evidently founded on the Scriptures, and the plain expositions of the primitive fathers. What additions were now made to that creed could be justified no less clearly by an appeal to the Divine Word. Thus, at the end of near four hundred years after the birth of Christ, the religion which he taught still retained, as to the articles of faith, its majestic simplicity. Nothing was imposed by the church upon the consciences of the people as necessary to a justifying and saving belief, but that which might be clearly proved by an appeal to Scripture; and as we look back upon the stormy sea of human passions, of worldly troubles and revolutions, through which the ark bearing the precious record had to pass, we cannot but feel that to possess that record now, bright and uninjured, is a proof that God himself preserved it, and preserved it for a people whom he loves.

Athanasius died before this happy termination of the disputes which had so long troubled the church. Valens directed his expulsion from Alexandria, and he only escaped the violence of the persecutor by a speedy flight. The capacious tomb, in which lay deposited the remains of his ancestors, furnished him on this occasion with a safe and sufficient shelter. His age, and long-formed habits of solemn thought, rendered such a retreat not unfit for this servant of God, standing, as he now was, on the borders of eternity. But Valens dreaded the effect of his unpopular measure. Athanasius was too greatly venerated for his well-proved piety to be made the victim of a

persecution like that instituted for the sake of a declining faction. He was, therefore, recalled to Alexandria, and ended his days in the year 373.

Of the other great men who lived during the period above described, the most remarkable were St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Basil. Mention has been made of the former in the account of the council held at Constantinople. He was born about the year 325, in the neighbourhood of Nazianzum, a small town of Cappadocia. His father, a man of some fortune, had been infected with heresy, but being converted to the Catholic faith, was elected bishop of his native city. Gregory manifested at an early age great genius and a fervent piety. Anxious to become master of all the learning of his times, he studied successively at Cæsarea Philippi, Alexandria, and Athens.

Not long after his arrival at the last-mentioned place, he became acquainted with Basil, and so laid the foundation of a friendship which had the most important influence on his future career. Both the one and the other delighted in study, and contemplated, with enthusiastic admiration, the idea and possible realization of spiritual perfection. Their attachment to each other increased with the increase of their piety and knowledge. They soon became celebrated throughout Athens for their extraordinary ability; their laborious devotion to study, and their still more remarkable purity of character.

Basil having left Athens, Gregory soon after resolved to return to Nazianzum. For some time his mind was agitated with painful doubts as to the choice which he ought to make between a solitary and an active life. His natural disposition; his delight in those lofty exercises of thought, which can rarely be sustained in the midst of

worldly agitations, almost induced him to hasten at once into the desert, and there spend the remainder of his days in uninterrupted prayer and meditation. But the image of his venerable and beloved father presented itself to his mind; and he felt how far more consistent it would be, both with filial and with Christian duty, to devote his time and ability to the calls of affection, than to spend them all upon himself in solitude.

Yielding to this conviction, Gregory proceeded to Nazianzum. His father constrained him, against his will, to receive ordination. He trembled at, and shrunk from, the responsibilities involved in the priesthood. But he speedily proved his fitness for the office. His father had been tempted into acknowledging the decisions of the Arian synod, assembled at Constantinople in 359. The old man appears to have been ignorant of the real tenets of those with whom he thus, for the moment, became associated. He was first made acquainted with his error by the monks of Cappadocia, who refused to hold any further communion with his church. Gregory lost no time in explaining to his father the real nature of the subject; and by eloquent discourses from the pulpit, and private converse among the people, he succeeded in restoring the peace which had been so seriously endangered.

Gregory's brother, Cæsarius, returned about this time from Constantinople, where his great abilities, and skill in the practice of medicine, had recommended him to the patronage of the court, and the friendship of the imperial family. But, like Gregory, he preferred retirement to the highest honours; and, rejecting the splendid temptations by which he was assailed, gladly sought the quiet home of his youth, as promising infinitely more of good and happiness than the court of the emperor.

The return of Cæsarius left Gregory at liberty to visit his friend St. Basil, who had so often invited him to share his solitary life. He lost no time in availing himself of the liberty thus afforded him. Some years spent in the desert with Basil served to mature his thoughts, and to render him still more able than before to overcome every temptation of worldly vanity or ambition. But the increasing infirmities of his father, and the return of his brother to Constantinople, obliged him to leave his beloved solitudes. On recommencing his labours at Nazianzum, he was obliged to allow himself to be consecrated as the coadjutor of his father in the bishopric. To this, however, he consented only on the condition that whenever his father was removed, he should not be obliged to become his successor. Such, indeed, was his unwillingness to accept of the dignity of a bishop, that when his friend Basil, exalted to the important see of Cæsarea, conferred on him the bishopric of Sasima, he at first rejected it, with an expression of anger; and when compelled by the entreaties of his father to accept it, he plainly intimated, that he never intended to take possession of his diocese. One of the reasons which he urged for his conduct in this respect, was the wild and barbarous nature of the district to which he was appointed. But he had shown equal dislike to the idea of being made bishop of Nazianzum; and his ready retirement from Constantinople indicates that, throughout his life, the love of unbroken study and meditation prevailed over every other feeling.

On the death of his father, Gregory took up his residence in Seleucia. His reputation was already sufficiently diffused to render the hostile parties of the day anxious for his support. He was accordingly invited to attend

the synod of Antioch; and soon after received a call from the orthodox at Constantinople, to take up his abode among them, and become their guide and pastor. The path of usefulness seemed plainly opened to him by this invitation. He proceeded to Constantinople; and gathering a congregation around him in the church of Anastasia, soon proved, both by his labours and his eloquence, how worthy he was of the highest station to which the church could exalt him. His election to the patriarchal dignity was not attended, as we have seen, with any happy results. He was too meek; too much a lover of peace, to allow any selfish consideration to induce him to retain an office in which he was viewed with distrust or envy. On leaving Constantinople, he returned to the neighbourhood of Nazianzum; and there, amid the scenes of his early youth, spent the remainder of his days in those serene and devout employments which no dream of ambition had ever deprived of their charm. Nor was it his own satisfaction only which he sought in this solitary life. Like many other men similarly constituted, he found himself better able, when far removed from the world, to perform the work which seemed really to be set him. He could then bring all his thoughts to bear upon the truths which it was the object of his life to defend and illustrate; and those eloquent and sublime discourses of his, which wrought so powerfully on the minds of his cotemporaries, and the beauty of which is still as deeply felt, would probably never have existed, had his delicate and susceptible spirit been long exposed to the agitations of a worldly career.

St. Basil was a man of more firmness and enterprise than Gregory. Having finished his studies at Athens, he repaired to Antioch, where he studied philosophy under

the celebrated Libanius; and afterwards pleaded publicly in the Forum as an advocate. From Antioch he proceeded to Alexandria, and visited the solitudes in its neighbourhood, rendered dear to his imagination as the abode of Athanasius, and so many other venerable men. He finally settled at Cæsarea. There he was ordained deacon, and in due time was admitted to the rank of presbyter. But troubles arising in the church, he again retired for a time into solitude. The period of his seclusion was spent in study and devotion, or in preaching to the inhabitants of the villages on the borders of the desert.

The bishop of Cæsarea, whose ordination Basil had opposed, was a man of amiable disposition; and knowing the worth of Basil, he was willing to forget any cause of dispute between them. Basil himself readily met the friendly feeling expressed towards him. He returned to Cæsarea, and there laboured in seasons of difficulty and distress with such a fervent charity, with such a grandeur of purpose and devotion, that even his enemies could not refuse him the meed of their admiration.

On the death of the bishop, Basil hastened from the city, to escape any popular outbreak in his favour. He was little desirous of a sudden elevation to the vacant dignity; and would probably have preferred, like Gregory, a life of solitude to any degree of power or honour. But the circumstances of the church rendered it of importance that no one of inferior ability or character should be allowed to obtain the see of Cæsarea. His friends, therefore, employed the whole of their influence to secure his election. Among the foremost were Gregory and his father. Success crowned their efforts, and Basil, as bishop of Cæsarea, became a powerful support to the or-

thodox party against the violence of the Arian emperor Valens. Many were the dangers which he had to encounter in making this bold defence. At one time his destruction seemed inevitable; at another, his feeble frame seemed ready to sink under the burden of those labours and anxieties which the state of his diocese obliged him to bear.*

But the struggles of this great man in support of evangelical truth were attended with vast and permanent blessings. The influence which he exercised on his own age was felt far and wide. He richly merited the title of *Great*, bestowed upon him by his cotemporaries; and his writings still remain, not only as a noble monument of his genius and piety, but as an invaluable treasure to the church at large. Few of the ancient fathers exhibited so remarkably as Basil the powerful union of calm, vigorous argument and spiritual sentiment. St. Gregory Nazianzen, in enumerating his works, says, "When I read his treatise of the creation, methinks I am present with the Creator. When I turn to the books which he wrote against heretics, I seem to behold the fire consuming sinners; when I peruse what he has written concerning the Holy Spirit, I acknowledge the God whom I possess, and hesitate not boldly to proclaim the truth. When I read the expositions of Scripture which he made for the unlearned, I understand the deep abysses of mysteries; when I hear his panegyrics of the martyrs, I despise my own body. I fancy myself present with those whom he praises, and feel excited to the combat. When I study the discourses which he has written concerning morals, and the manner of living well, my heart and my soul

* He died in the year 379, about ten years after his elevation to the bishopric.

are purified, that they may become the temple of the Holy Spirit—they lead me unto virtue; they reform, they instruct, they change me.”

St. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, is known to later times by his valuable catechetical lectures. He seems to have embraced the doctrines of the Semi-arians, and to have been acknowledged by them when driven from his diocese, through the private hostility of Acacius, bishop of Cæsarea. But whatever doubts might be entertained at one time, respecting his orthodoxy, he was formally reinstated in his dignity by the council of Constantinople. Ephrem, the Syrian, a deacon of Edessa, was another writer of this age, whose discourses and treatises on the various duties of a religious life have been generally greatly valued for the fervent spirit of devotion by which they are characterized. St. Jerome says,* that they were so highly esteemed in his time that they were publicly read in many churches after the Scriptures.

Ambrose, Augustine, Chrysostom, are names which shed an imperishable lustre on the period immediately succeeding that above described. By their labours in the cause of divine truth, the church was provided with an inexhaustible supply of noble arguments in defence of its doctrines; of living, spiritual demonstrations of their fitness to exalt the human soul to the highest state of power and freedom.

* Script. Eccles. .

CHAPTER IX.

INCREASE OF THE CHURCH—ITS CLERGY AND GOVERNMENT—
RITES AND CEREMONIES—GENERAL STATE—CONCLUSION.

IN the midst of the persecutions and troubles to which the church was exposed, it still continued to extend its boundaries, and to bring first one and then another people under the yoke of Christ. A flourishing branch of the church had existed for many years in Persia, when it was assailed by the most cruel persecution, in the fourth century. Armenia had also received the gospel in early times, and had now a Christian monarch. The remote provinces of India; Abyssinia and Æthiopia; had been sought by teachers of the gospel, and contained numerous converts. In Europe, the Goths had been instructed by Christian captives, in the second century, and a bishop of the Goths was present at the Council of Nicæa. The British islands enjoyed the singular blessing of receiving the gospel in the apostolic age; and strong reasons exist to favour the belief that it was St. Paul who first preached in this country the glad tidings of salvation. The traditions respecting Lucius, a British king, in the second century, though many of them ill supported, are sufficient to prove, by their general tendency and spirit, that Christianity was, at that period, firmly established in the country. Little is known respecting the progress of the gospel in Britain for near eighty years after this time. But Origen, in the middle

of the third century, speaks of it as knowing the unity of the Godhead through Christ; and as feeling the influence of the gospel, and the power of the Saviour's kingdom. The persecution under Diocletian, by extending to this country, furnished another proof of the conspicuous station which the British Christians occupied in the church. It was at this time that the celebrated St. Alban fell a martyr to his generous hospitality, and suddenly received faith. A minister of religion had sought refuge in his house from the pursuit of the persecutors. Alban listened to the account which he gave of his faith; and felt interested in the supplications which he offered up to the God of heaven and earth, and his Son Jesus Christ. His mind expanded to the influences of divine truth; and he rejoiced to own himself a convert to the gospel. But the retreat of his guest had been discovered. Alban saw the officers at his gate. He knew that but a few hours remained for the venerable teacher who had led him so wonderfully from darkness to light; from death to life. Measuring the worth of such a man with his own, he resolved to save him, though at the expense of his life. Instantly enveloping himself in the garb of the priest, he went forth to the officers; was seized, carried before the magistrate, and immediately after to execution. The British church, from this period, rapidly increased. Three British bishops, it is said, were present at the council of Arles, in the year 314. In the council of Sardica, held in 347, bishops from this country took part with others of the orthodox party in defending Athanasius against the attacks of his adversaries. St. Hilary even salutes them particularly, and speaks with admiration of their orthodoxy. When Constantine sum-

moned a council at Ariminum,* in Italy, the western bishops were provided, out of the public treasury, with the means of meeting the expenses of their journey. But of those who came out of Gaul and Britain, only three would accept of the provision thus made; a fair proof of the liberality with which Lucius, or other patrons of the British church, had endowed its ministers.

The doctrines of the church, as authoritatively received, have been sufficiently described in the account of its struggles with the parties by which it was assailed. But it is evident that a vast number of particulars which have, in later times, been determined either by the decrees or the practice of different independant churches, formed, in the primitive ages, no settled part of the Ecclesiastical system. None of the interpretations of the doctrine of the sacraments; of election; or of justification, given by the greatest fathers of the church, were adopted into the creed. In these respects the believer was left free and unfettered. The terms of communion were clearly defined by the formularies drawn up in the two general Councils of Nicæa and Constantinople. Every one who sincerely accepted the creeds then published, was, so far as the Articles of Faith were concerned, acknowledged as a member of the church.

It is evident, therefore, that on many subjects connected with the doctrine of the church, we must be contented with the scattered notices found in the writings of the fathers. But the question will naturally arise in some minds, to what degree the opinions of the fathers ought to be received as determining the faith of the church.

* Rimini.

In answer to such an inquiry, we may suggest, that where the early writers are generally agreed upon any particular point, the testimony thereby given to its truth or importance, falls but little short of that afforded by the decision of a council. It can scarcely be doubted but that in such a case, had disputes arisen, and a synod been assembled, the decision would have been on the side of the fathers. That no controversy of sufficient importance did exist to render the summoning of a synod necessary to determine doctrines not named in the creeds, is presumptive evidence, either that a general agreement prevailed on the subject, or that the points referred to were not regarded as essentially entering into the rule of faith.

As the church continued to increase, so the power and duties of its ministers, its system of government and discipline, became more distinctly defined. In the apostolic times, the bishop and the presbyter were separated from each other by a narrow line, scarcely perceptible but to those who were keenly alive to spiritual mysteries. But a century had not passed away, when the distinction between the two orders was as manifest to the world, as it was at first only to the faithful members of the church. The bishop's wealth and influence gradually increased; and the distance between the two orders increased in the same proportion. Nor was it only the wider separation of the bishop from the other orders of the clergy which attended the growth of episcopal power. Different classes of bishops were created. There were city bishops and country bishops. Archbishops; metropolitans; and patriarchs.* The progress of the church; its enlarging

* Patriarchs, as such, were not known till late in the fifth century.

powers; its multiplying revenues; almost necessarily led to this distinction of rank among those who managed its concerns. But it cannot be denied that with the variety of grades thus created, pride and ambition worked their way with awful success through the several ranks of the clergy. That which was good in ecclesiastical discipline, became bad for Christian morals. That which kept order in the church, created disorder in the minds of its ministers. Even in the early times of which we have spoken, struggles took place for bishopricks, and other high appointments, which would have disgraced the candidates for any political distinction.

The dioceses of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch were regarded from the first century as the chief and most important divisions of the church. Their bishops easily obtained authority over those of the inferior districts; and though, according to St. Cyprian, all bishops were essentially equal, he who was at the head of an ancient and wealthy church, soon proved practically that such an equality belonged only to the pure and spiritual episcopacy of apostolic times. Almost rivals of the dioceses above-named, were those of Milan, Arelatum, Ephesus, and Cæsarea; and especially, after the founding of Constantinople, the see of which the bishop of that imperial city was the head.

Rome had singular claims to respect. It was the city in which apostles had laboured and bled. The foundations of the church there were laid deep and firm. While others were swept away by the convulsions of the following age, the church established in that ancient city grew daily in strength; became celebrated for its saints and martyrs; and was noted, above all others, for its firm adherence to primitive doctrine; and for its readi-

ness to succour those who were persecuted for conscience sake.

The magnificence of Rome itself as the ancient capital of the empire; the sublime associations connected with its name; its still undisputed pre-eminence among the cities of the world as the cradle of power and dominion, could not fail to increase the feeling of reverence inspired by the contemplation of its rising church. But more important than all these considerations, was that of its apostolic origin. Nothing was regarded in those ancient times as conferring so great a dignity on a church as its being able to prove that it was planted by an apostle. This honour was never denied to that of Rome; and hence a greater number of circumstances met together to give it glory in the eyes of Christians than in the case of any other existing church.

But whatever the honour paid to the church, it was not till many ages had passed away, that the bishop of Rome was allowed to assume lordship over his brethren. We have seen that Hosius, not the bishop of Rome, or his representatives, presided at the great Council of Nicæa. So also in the Council of Constantinople, which has long been acknowledged as a universal council, the bishop of Rome had no control either in person or by his legates. But though in some cases his power was opposed, and in others only respected as accidentally great, there was plainly a tendency, from very early times, to the creation of that ecclesiastical monarchy which was at length established. The haughty attempt of Victor to compel the churches of the East to conform to that of Rome in the observance of Easter; Cyprian's memorable reproach of the vain and ill-informed Stephen; and the

decree made in the Council of Sardica,* allowing any deposed bishop to appeal to Rome, indicate clearly, though in different ways, the progress of that power which, in the end, so completely triumphed over every other.

But while the revenues and grandeur of the church were daily augmenting; and while dignitaries were created with titles corresponding to the greatness of their pretensions, so was the sanctity of ecclesiastical ordinances declared by the creation of inferior orders, which might form, as it were, a strong barrier between the higher clergy and the people. Thus as titles were invented which rendered that of the simple bishop low and mean, so were others created which left the humble deacon with many far beneath him. In Rome, about the middle of the third century, there were seven subdeacons; forty-two acoluthi; and fifty-two exorcists; lectores; and ostiarii.†

Jerome,‡ or an author writing about his time, describes seven orders of the clergy, the lowest being that of the grave-diggers; the next that of doorkeepers; the third of readers; the fourth of subdeacons. Acolythists§ are not mentioned by Jerome, but though unknown to the eastern church, they were common in the western. An especial canon was published by the Council of Carthage, held towards the end of the fourth century, regulating their ordination and duties. According to this, the newly-ordained acolythite was to receive from the archdeacon a candlestick and wax taper, that he might understand it to be his duty to light the candles in the church. So also an empty flagon was to be given

* A. D. 344. † Eusebius. Hist. Eccles. lib. vi. c. xliii.

‡ Hieron. Op. t. v. p. 99. § Followers or attendants.

him; and by this he was to learn that it was for him to provide the wine which the priest would require when celebrating the Eucharist. Singers are also named in some accounts of the inferior orders; but exorcists with especial note. The power of delivering the unhappy creatures who suffered under demoniacal possession, was exercised by the first disciples of our Lord as one of the highest gifts of faith. It is uncertain when the duty of exorcising became that of a peculiar order. But from the frequent mention made of exorcists in the fourth century, they had evidently been then for some time recognized in the church as a particular class. The Council of Carthage, above referred to, directed by one of its canons, that the bishop should give the exorcist at his ordination a book containing forms of exorcism, and should say, "Receive these, and commit them to memory; and have thou the power of laying hands upon the possessed, and catechumens." When a reader was ordained, the bishop gave him the book of the gospels, and said, "Be thou a reader of the word of God:" and when a porter, or doorkeeper, the bishop gave him the keys, with the words, "Bear thyself as one that must render account to God of those things which are locked under these keys." Catechists are not here named among the orders of the clergy; but we know how important a part they performed in preparing converts for the rite of baptism; and the fact, that such a man as Origen spent a large portion of his life in exercising the office of a catechist, is sufficient to prove both the value and the respectability of the class.

The distinction between the clergy and the laity was recognised, at the beginning of the third century, as of primitive origin. St. Clement of Rome speaks especially

of the duties peculiar to laymen,* distinguishing them thereby from the clergy; and Clement of Alexandria† describes St. John as searching out men who, being indicated by the Spirit, might be set apart for the clerisy.‡

Of the laity, there were two principal classes, the faithful and the Catechumens; the one, that is, consisting of those who had been baptized, and were, therefore, spoken of as *the illuminated*; the other, of those who were under trial and preparation for the solemn sacrament of initiation. To the former, exclusively, belonged the privilege of joining the clergy in the sublimer offices of devotion; of offering up the Lord's Prayer; and partaking of the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. So too with regard to the discourses delivered in the church. The faithful only were permitted to listen to explications of the more remarkable mysteries of religion. It was baptism which opened the way to the innermost shrine in the temple of divine truth. Enough was taught to convince the humblest inquirer that Christ is the Saviour of all true penitent sinners. But it was a part of evangelical discipline to require the candidate for Christian honours and privileges to await, with patient humility, the teaching of his more experienced brethren or fathers; not to rush, with a daring confidence in his own powers of understanding, into the depths of spiritual truth; but to

* Epist. I. ad Corinth. sec. xl.

† Eusebius. Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. xxiii.

‡ The Greek word κληρος, from which the word clergy is derived, signifies a lot, or inheritance; and has been applied to the ministers of religion, as indicating their election of God, or their belonging to God. Suicer. Thesau.

look for growth in knowledge, as ever dependent upon growth in grace.

The catechetical instruction received by Christian converts was more general, and fuller, in the second and third centuries, than in the first. Originally, a simple confession, made at the time when faith was found to work with quickening influence on the heart, was deemed sufficient to justify the baptism of the convert. But the mere profession of belief in Christ, was less depended upon in the later, than in the earlier, ages of the church. This did not arise altogether from the fear that the base and hypocritical might, with the increasing prosperity of the community, desire to join it for the purposes of gain. Such, from the very nature of the case, would be the sin of only a few. The danger which the church seemed chiefly to apprehend, was that arising from the influx of members who had nothing but some sudden impulse to justify their pretensions to conversion. The hasty admission of members into any society, is commonly attended with the ruin both of its power and its respectability. There were numberless reasons why the church had to dread such a result, should it be guilty of laxity or indifference in examining the merits and sincerity of candidates for baptism. It had no proper power, none upon which it could really depend, but that which arose from its moral influence, and from its claims to the homage of men's hearts and consciences. This lost, and everything was lost most essential to its prosperity or safety.

Nor was its own security the only object to be regarded when the church proceeded to admit new members into its bosom. The Redeemer had taught it to consider itself as his mystical body. To receive the untried and hasty professor, therefore, into communion, was to hazard

the commission of a grievous offence against the honour of Christ; and practically to deny the truth of a doctrine upon which the intrinsical glory and authority of the church depend.

To guard against such a danger, wise provisions were made to test the sincerity of every professed convert to the gospel. A course of preparatory exercises was appointed. This extended over a period varying from a few months to two or three years. During this time, ample opportunity was given both to the candidate himself, and to those charged with his instruction, to learn the true state of his mind. Patience, humility, thoughtfulness, and self-control, were the virtues proper to such a period of probation. When wise and experienced teachers were employed in the catechetical schools, a vast sum of sound and experimental knowledge was communicated to the candidates; and the system, fairly wrought out by those in authority, and attended to by those subjected to its influence, was calculated to produce the most beneficial effects to the church at large.

Corresponding to the care employed to prevent the admission of the vacillating or profane into the church, was the severity exercised when any of its members was found guilty of violating its laws or principles. This was authorized by the clearest intimations of the gospel. "If he will not hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man, and a publican," and the practice of the apostles shows that this precept of our Lord was strictly adhered to in the church as long as they were its rulers.

But there was a lesser and a greater excommunication. By the first, the offender was deprived of the privilege of partaking of the Eucharist; but not of attending the other services, or of joining in the prayers of the church. By

the second, he was altogether cut off from communion with the people of Christ; and was so to continue till by repentance, and an open declaration of his grief and humility, he obtained solemn absolution. This was not to be accomplished by either short or easy methods. In some cases the period of penance was extended to ten years. Two years were considered sufficient in the less sinful instances of apostacy. The bishop was also sometimes intrusted with the power of modifying the punishment; and sickness, or the approach of death, was generally allowed to give the penitent a claim to indulgence.

When the offender declared himself truly desirous of being reconciled to the church, he was admitted into the lowest of the four classes into which penitents were divided. This consisted of those who were called by a Greek name, signifying "those who weep;" and it was customary for them to continue a year in this class. Their station during this period was at the gate of the church; where they stood and lamented their offences; and besought the prayers of the faithful as they passed to their devotions.

If this probationary season was properly completed, the penitent was next admitted into the class of *hearers*, and had now the comfort of being allowed to listen to the services of the church. In the third year, he entered the class of those who bowed the knee, and began the course of supplication, which was considered a part of the exercise proper to an acknowledged penitent. At last, that is in the fourth year, he was allowed to stand with the other members of the church, and to join them in the performance of divine service, with the exception of partaking of the Eucharist, to which he was not admitted till the full term of the appointed penance was completed. This

was not always accomplished in four years. The separate acts of penitence required sometimes a longer, sometimes a shorter period; but in every case, while the discipline of the church was determined by the earnest desire of its pastors to preserve it pure and undefiled, such caution was exercised as rendered it highly difficult for any offender whatsoever to recover his position without a sincere and hearty repentance.

We have seen from the writings of some of the fathers what were the sentiments generally entertained respecting the two great sacraments of the church, baptism and the Supper of the Lord. These solemn and all-important rites were celebrated, at first, with the simplicity which indicated that the command of Christ only was considered in their administration. New forms, supplementary observances, were introduced as the church increased, and as other feelings, besides those of pure faith and love, seemed to require excitement, control, or nourishment. Some variety also of tone may be discovered in the expressions used by the fathers when describing these sacraments. One man would contemplate them more profoundly than another. The personal experience of the writer or preacher would operate strongly on his mind as he referred to the instruments or channels of grace. There will ever be much in accidental associations to influence the sentiments of an ardent and devout nature on subjects of this kind. But while this is sufficient to account for most of the superficial differences existing in the discourses of the fathers, or in their common mode of describing the sacraments, it is important to observe, that the primary doctrine is the same in all; the power and grace of God; the regenerating virtues of the divine Spirit; the actual communion of the blessed Jesus with

believers, being, in all cases, spoken of as the real source of life and holiness to those who are saved.

As the age advanced, the love of speculation increased. This unhappily gave rise to those various dissensions in the church which have been described in the preceding pages. Heresy, from the first, employed its pernicious spirit on the mysteries connected with our Lord's incarnation and divinity. It would not be difficult to trace the line of tradition along which the doctrine of the Ebionites, and other heretics of the apostolic age, arrived at the stage at which Arius found it, and made it the groundwork of his own dangerous speculations. The personality of the Holy Spirit furnished, we have seen, the next theme for controversy. It was of like importance to the truth and fulness of the Christian scheme that the Scripture doctrine should be established in this instance, as in that of our Lord's divinity. By a wonderful series of providential events, as well as by the faithful devotion of the church, the true doctrine was in both cases asserted and preserved. The only two Œcumenical or general councils held during the period with which we are concerned, fully and distinctly proclaimed the doctrine of the church to be the doctrine of the Scriptures.

But while, in this case, the power of the church was so effectually exercised in the defence of pure evangelical truth, it did not obtain equal success when engaged against the less clearly defined errors of ingenious theorists. The same may be said of its state in respect to the growth of that unhealthy feeling which restlessly sought its nourishment in some new practice or object of devotion, rendered sacred to an uninquiring affection.

The name of Origen is associated with the noblest ideas of Christian holiness, of genius and erudition. But

it is also connected with some distressing instances of the danger attending theological speculation, even though chastened and guarded by sincere piety. Origen introduced the theory of a threefold interpretation of Scripture. The one, according to the literal or historical; the other, according to the moral; and the third according to the mystical, sense of the Divine Word. It was not in making such a distinction as this that Origen committed any error against the simplicity of heavenly truth. Scarcely a commentator can be found who does not vary his mode of interpretation according to the principles of Origen. Sometimes the literal meaning, at others the moral, and then the mystical or spiritual, is given, as the mind of the inquirer is struck by this or that point in the narrative. Every reader of Scripture is affected in various ways by the events which mark the development of God's designs. He is sometimes, without suspecting it, as mystical in his feelings and interpretations as was even Origen himself. At others, he is wholly confined to the plain historical narrative—at others, he moralizes upon it.

So far, moreover, was Origen from satisfying himself with a mere imaginative or notional understanding of Scripture, that he did more than any other of the early theologians towards forming habits of sound criticism. He not only studied Hebrew himself, and that under every disadvantage, but by the compilation of the Hexapla, he opened the path of critical knowledge to those who, without such a help, must have remained for ever ignorant of its value and excellence.

But pure as were the intentions of Origen; far removed as his sanctified spirit was from that of heresy, he gave a form and a name to speculative fancies, which acted

with injurious force upon weaker, and less holy minds. His mystical, vague expressions respecting the generation of our Lord were laid hold of by the Arians, and adapted to their own purposes. His desire to promote the glory of Christ's merits, and to exalt God's mercy as exhibited therein, sometimes led him to speak of the effects of redemption in a manner not justified by Scripture. The delight which he felt in meditating on the character of spiritual beings; on their wonderful relation to the human race, and on the future condition of the soul, drew from him expressions which could with difficulty be interpreted as teaching only the doctrine of the church.

Origen's education in the philosophical schools of Alexandria, will account, in great measure, for the peculiar style which he adopted in his writings and discourses. But his own sublime genius carried him further than other men were likely to follow him with safety. Thus, when his ideas, only faintly traced, or enigmatically expressed, were boldly adopted by his followers, and unskillfully published to the world, they were really calculated to excite alarm in the minds of sober churchmen. Whether he could fairly be charged with entertaining any opinion contrary to the known faith of his brethren, was a question which, soon after his death, began to be debated with considerable acrimony. By some he was regarded as the head of a sect which must be put down by the denunciations of preachers, and the decrees of synods. By others, the most doubtful of his expressions or sentiments were spoken of as capable of an orthodox interpretation. St. Augustine himself was of this opinion; and the errors into which this wonderful man had fallen seemed to shrink into insignificance when compared with

the value of his carefully-digested arguments in support of the gospel.

In the accounts given of the increase of opinions, not to be found in the simple creed of the church, Origen is generally spoken of as having done more than all the rest of the fathers towards producing this unhealthy state of feeling. The celebrated Vincentius of Lirens does not hesitate to place him among the fomentors of heresy. Speaking of the temptations to this sin, he says, "Though I could bring forth many to show this kind of temptation, yet scarcely can any be compared to that of Origen, in whom were very many gifts, so rare, so singular, so strange, that in the beginning, any would have thought that his opinions might have been believed of all men. For if a good life procureth authority, he was a man of great industry, of great chastity, patience, and labour: if family or learning, who more noble? being in the first place of that house which was honourable for martyrdom, himself afterward for Christ, deprived not of his father only, but also spoiled of all his patrimony; and so much he profited in the straits of holy poverty, that, as it is reported, for the confession of Christ's name, he often endured affliction. Neither had he only these gifts, all which afterward served for temptation, but also a force of wit so profound, so quick, so elegant, that he far excelled almost all other whatsoever. A man of such learning and universal erudition, that there were few things in divinity, in human philosophy, perhaps almost none, which he had not perfectly attained: who having gotten the Greek tongue, laboured also with success about the Hebrew. And for his eloquence, why should I speak of it? whose language was so pleasant, so soft, so sweet, that in my opinion not words but honey flowed from his mouth.

What things were so hard to believe which with force of argument he made not plain ? What so difficult to bring to pass which he made not to seem easy ? But perchance he maintained his assertions by arguments only. Nay, without question, there was never any doctor which used more examples of Holy Scripture. But yet, haply, he wrote not much. No man living more ; yea, so much, that all his works seem to me, not only more than can be read, but even more than can be found ; who, not to lack any furtherance to learning, lived also until he was passing old. But yet, perchance, unfortunate in his scholars. What man ever more happy ? for of his nursing grew up doctors and priests without number ; yea, confessors and martyrs. Further : who is able to prosecute in words the admiration with which he was universally beheld ? the glory, the favour ? Who that was very zealous for religion, repaired not to him from the furthest parts of the world ? What Christian did not venerate him almost as a prophet ? What philosopher did not honour him as a master ? And how greatly he was revered, not only of private men, but also of the empire itself, histories do speak, which report that he was sent for by the mother of the emperor Alexander Severus, for the merit of his heavenly wisdom, with the grace whereof he was full, as she was with the love thereof. The same thing is also testified by his epistles, which he wrote with the authority of a Christian master, unto Philip the emperor, the first Christian among all the Roman princes. And if any man upon our report admitteth not the testimony of a Christian, touching his wonderful knowledge, at least let him receive an heathen confession in the testimony of philosophers. For that impious Porphyry saith that he himself, being but yet a mere boy, moved with his fame,

travelled into Alexandria, where he did see him, being then old, but yet such an one, and so learned, as he that had builded him a fortress of universal knowledge. Time would sooner fail me than I could touch though briefly upon those notable gifts which were in that man, all which notwithstanding pertained not only to the glory of religion, but also to the greatness of the temptation. For among how many is there one that would willingly have forsaken a man of such wit, of so deep learning, of so rare grace, and would not sooner have used that saying, that he had rather err with Origen than believe aught with others? And why should I say more? The matter came to that issue, that, as the end showed, not an usual and common, but a passing dangerous temptation of so great a man, so great a doctor, so great a prophet, carried away very many from soundness of faith. Wherefore this Origen, so rare and singular a man, too presumptuously abusing the grace of God, indulging too much his own wit, trusting himself as sufficient; little esteeming the old simplicity of the Christian religion, presuming to be wiser than all other, contemning the traditions of the church, and the teaching of the old fathers; expounding certain deep chapters of the Scriptures after a new fashion, deserved that the church of God should also say of him 'If there arise up in the midst of thee a prophet;' and a little after, 'Thou shalt not hear the words of that prophet;' and again, 'Because your Lord God doth tempt you, whether ye love him or no.' And surely it is not only a temptation, but also a great temptation, when a man seduceth secretly, and by little and little, the church depending upon him, admiring his wit, knowledge, eloquence, conversation, and grace, nothing suspecting him, nothing fearing him, suddenly from the old

religion to new profaneness. But some will say that the works of Origen have been corrupted. I will not gainsay it, but rather wish it were so. For that hath been both said and written by some, not only Catholics, but also heretics. But this is now the point to be considered, that although not he, yet the books passing abroad under his name, are a great temptation, which, full of many hurtful blasphemies, are read and loved, not as the books of others, but as his; so that although Origen gave no cause of originating erroneous doctrine, yet his authority hath been the occasion why the error is received."

The language used by Vincentius would evidently be far too strong were the errors attributed to Origen merely trivial or fanciful. Many of the ancients* regarded him as unsound in his doctrine of the Trinity, and hence, it is probable, the severity of the sentence passed upon him by Vincentius. His view of future punishments, and of their duration; of the influence which the prayers of the church may exercise on the state of the departed; and of the peculiar nature of the body with which the soul shall be united at the resurrection—the view which he took of matters of this kind could not, it is true, be justified by an appeal to the writings of the apostolic fathers; it could find as little support, we may believe, in the recognized

* Vincentius Lirinensis "For the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith against the Profane Novelties of all Heretics." c. xvii. Vincentius lived in the reign of Theodosius and Valentinian. He was the author of the famous maxim, that the Catholic church holds that which hath been believed everywhere, always, and of all men. *Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est.* "For that is truly and properly *Catholic*, (universal,) as the very force and nature of the word doth declare, which comprehendeth all things in general after an universal manner, and that shall we do if we follow *universality; antiquity; consent.*"

traditions of the church. But it is equally probable that no definite authoritative statement had been ever made on these subjects, and that Origen might, therefore, feel himself at liberty to speculate upon them as he chose. The great mischief was that what with Origen was little more than speculation, became in other minds a settled and erroneous belief. His writings were studied as those of a great master whose every suggestion might be regarded as sacred. Thus notions were converted into doctrines; and the opinions of one man became, in process of time, venerated as traditions of the church.

Origen had been personally exposed to unjust persecution. His piety, genuine and exalted as that of a saint, his learning, and genius, had failed to protect him from his rivals and enemies. The troubles which attended him, even to the grave, were the result of his faith and devotion; not of his speculations. But after his death, many wise and good men plainly discovered the dangerous tendencies of some of his opinions. A party was formed, which embraced most of the Christians in Palestine, many of those in Egypt and other countries, and which devoted itself entirely to the teaching of his system. Methodius, bishop, first of Olympus, and then of Tyre, undertook to refute some of his most speculative notions. But it was not till the end of the fourth century that the followers of Origen became subject to any formal condemnation; nor even then were the proceedings taken against them marked by the general consent of Christians. This is an important fact. The opinions of Origen were allowed free circulation, till they had acquired a firm hold of the minds of some of the most active and intelligent doctors of the church. We have thus an example of the mode by which the gathering

mass of opinions assumed another character as the body of ecclesiastical tradition began to be formed. Their sources were gradually lost sight of. The suspicion which at first attended them grew weaker. They yielded to the plastic power of the great intellects which worked upon them. The fire of devotional thought and aspiring imaginations, contributed to blend them together; and the whole presented at length the appearance of an even surface, bright, and polished, and many-coloured; but infinitely inferior in beauty to the one pure tablet, its material substantial truth, on which the blessed Spirit wrote the first and the everlasting confession of the church.

From a very simple outline of the proceedings of some of the councils held during the fourth century, we may form a tolerably accurate notion of the state of discipline as then prevailing in the church. Thus in the decrees of the council of Laodicea, held it is supposed some time between that of Nicæa and that of Constantinople,* we read that no newly baptized person ought to be promoted to a bishopric.† In the fourth canon it is stated that clergymen ought not to be usurers. Whether this, and other such rules, were published merely as warnings, or as laws against offences really existing, may be fairly doubted; but some distressing suspicions are created in the mind, at finding so many church canons of a character like this. In the seventh canon, which refers to the receiving of heretics, especial mention is made of the quarto-decimans, or those who kept Easter on the fourteenth day of the month, without reference to Sunday.

* Probably in the year 366.

† But, as if to show how canons could be set aside or disregarded, Nectarius was nominated to the bishopric of Constantinople even before he had been baptized.

By the tenth, Catholic, or orthodox Christians, are prohibited from giving their daughters in marriage to heretics. The twelfth and thirteenth order, that the choice of a bishop should be approved by the metropolitan, and by the bishops of the province, and should not be left altogether to the people. This evidently intimates that, at least up to the present time, the lay members of the church had a large and important concern in the election of the higher clergy.

After some regulations respecting the singing, which was to be confined to the appointed chanters, and the reading of the gospel and the psalms, it is ordered, "that after the bishop's sermon, the prayers of the catechumens shall be read, apart by themselves; and that when the catechumens are gone, the prayer of the penitents shall be offered up; and that after these, having received imposition of hands, are departed, the prayer of the faithful* shall be repeated three times successively. That the first prayer shall be made in silence, but the second and third with a loud voice, after which the peace shall be pronounced. That when the priests give it to the bishop, the laity shall give it to each other. That then the oblation shall be carried on to the end; none but those who are holy being permitted to approach the altar or to receive the communion."

A striking proof is afforded in the twentieth canon of the increasing reverence entertained for the various degrees of ecclesiastical dignity. Thus it is ordained in the rule referred to, that deacons shall not sit in the presence of a priest without his leave; and that the ministers who are below the deacon, shall show the same respect to him which he shows to the priest.

* The Lord's prayer.

By the twenty-ninth canon, Christians are commanded not to observe the festivals of the Jews. They are, therefore, not to feast on a Saturday; but to labour on that day, and to feast on the Sunday. The caution against communicating in any way with heretics is frequently repeated. The blessing of heretics is not to be received; and believers ought not to pray with them.

Other canons follow; and we learn from them how anxiously the rulers of the church provided against the minutest irregularity which might occur in its government. Thus it is ordained, that no clergyman should leave his diocese without canonical letters, or the consent of the bishop; that the porters should not leave the gates, even for a moment, or under pretence of praying; that women ought not to come near the altar; that none ought to be baptized in the second week of Lent; that he who desires to be baptised, ought to be instructed in the faith, and to give notice on Holy Thursday to the priests, or the bishop, that he will present himself for baptism. These rules are followed by others, directing that those who were baptized during sickness, ought to receive instruction in the faith if they recovered; that those who are baptized shall, after baptism, be anointed with the heavenly chrism; that no offerings shall be made during Lent except on Saturdays and Sundays; that the fast in the last week of Lent ought not to be broken; that the whole of Lent should be kept, and none but dry meats eaten; that the feasts of the martyrs ought not to be observed in Lent, except on Saturdays and Sundays; that marriages should not be celebrated in Lent; that Christians ought to behave themselves sedately at marriage feasts; that clergymen should not be present at the spectacles or balls made at

marriage feasts, but should leave before the mask begins; that neither clergymen nor laymen ought to make feasts at taverns; that priests ought not to enter nor go up into the pulpit before the bishop be come into the church, unless he be sick or absent; that bishops must not be placed in small towns or villages, but visitors, who ought to do nothing without the advice of the bishop who is in the city; and the same rule is appointed for the presbyters; that neither bishops nor priests ought to make the oblation in their own houses; that private psalms ought not to be sung in churches, nor any books read there which are not canonical, but only the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.

The canonical books here referred to, are enumerated in the next canon; and the list includes the books of Esther, Job, and Ruth, while the canonical books of the New Testament comprehend the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the seven Catholic Epistles, and the fourteen Epistles of St. Paul; but the Revelation is not mentioned in this catalogue.

Other synods passed similar decrees, regulating the all-important matter of discipline; and however strange some of the rules thus established may now seem to us, they were doubtless called for by the peculiar character and exigences of the age.

The Council of Gangra was held within a few years of that of Laodicea; and is said to have been summoned for the especial purpose of condemning the efforts of a faction to introduce into the church novel practices and austerities. 'Thus the first of the canons established by this council is directed against those who disallow marriage, and deny to a married person the hope of salvation. The second anathematizes those who condemn such as eat

flesh. The third, those who encourage slaves in despising their masters. The fourth, those who prohibit Christians from receiving the Eucharist at the hands of a married priest. The fifth pronounces a similar condemnation against such as treat the house of God, and the assemblies held in it, with disrespect. The sixth condemns those who would have another than the public church, and would justify the performance of the service without a priest approved by the bishop. The seventh and eighth anathematize those who receive the ecclesiastical offerings out of the church, unauthorized by the bishop or his representative. The ninth condemns those who remain unmarried, not because of the excellency of that state, but because they regard marriage itself as abominable. The tenth condemns those who insult the married. The eleventh, such as despise the agapæ, or feasts of charity. The twelfth, those who think to render themselves holier than others by singularity of dress. The next three are directed against women who leave off their proper feminine attire; who forsake their husbands, and neglect their children under pretence of devotion. The following canon condemns such as are wanting in reverence to their parents; and by the next, a similar anathema is pronounced against women who cut off their hair, to destroy the sign of that submission which they owe their husbands. The eighteenth condemns those who fast on the Sunday with the pretence of greater strictness and severity. The nineteenth, those who break the fasts of the church with contemptuous neglect; and the last, those who despise the assemblies held in honour of the martyrs. In conclusion, the fathers of the council drew up a declaration, which is deservedly valued as an evidence of the good sense and piety which were employed

in resisting the influx of superstitions and novelties now so much to be dreaded. "We ordain these things, not to exclude those who, according to the advice of Holy Scripture, desire to exercise themselves in the church by the practices of continence and holiness, but against those who use these austerities for a pretence to satisfy their ambition; who despise those who lead an ordinary life; and who introduce innovations contrary to Scripture and the laws of the church. In a word, we wish and desire that those things may be observed in the church which we have learned from Scripture, and the tradition of the apostles.

Intimations exist in writings of the same period which show, that among the multiplying rites of the church, some had been introduced which belonged to opinions long privately entertained by certain of the fathers, or to common sentiments and desires cherished by the mass of the people, less stern, less simple in their Christianity. The worship of the saints; of the Virgin Mary; prayers for the dead; and the doctrine of purgatory, are clearly alluded to by Epiphanius and other writers, as beginning in this age to be more or less generally practised.

Such are the most important incidents and circumstances connected with the establishment of Christ's Universal Church. Its foundation was the work of the blessed Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son. Its victory over the world was the result of faith. Its continuance and progress can only be accounted for by a reference to the sublime truth that Christ ever liveth to make intercession for it. The history of the church is that of the most wonderful of all institutions. Others, whether they be empires, schools of philosophy, or po-

litical constitutions, do not become incrustated merely with the follies, or changing fashions of the times. They lose their vitality; prove that they are but like all other visible things, temporal and perishable; and after a brief period, brief in comparison with the expectations formed of their durability, they pass away, dissipated, or torn into shreds and tatters by the mere antagonism of earth and time.

But not thus with the church of Christ. It has suffered indeed from the fury of enemies, and the folly of friends. The unhealthy vapours of a gloomy mysticism; the storms of daring heresy; the blighting frosts of infidelity, have all assailed it. But like the people of God passing, in old time, through the Red Sea, or under the cloud in the wilderness, it has borne up, with its innate, glorious strength, against them all. It has kept its name as the church of God even in the days of darkest depression. The enemy has shrunk abashed from its confession of faith when he seemed most secure of triumphing over it; and the world, when nothing appeared wanting to its victory, has suddenly discovered that the church had still an inner chamber; a strong-hold; a fastness, in which the best of her sons were as ready as ever to contend for her interests and honour.

Contemplated in its highest character as the body of Christ, the church must ever appear to the eye of faith as a bright and noble vision. The happiest feelings of true piety gather around this vision, and give it a species of natural subsistence. In proportion to the vivid realizations of faith, is the desire cherished in the heart to unite its whole mass of affections with the pure divinity which forms the soul of the church. When the church is considered in its lower state as a mere congregation of pro-

fessed believers; as a society of persons acknowledging particular truths, but not certainly feeling their power, we then easily understand how it has become subject to so many changes; how it has so often yielded to the world; and assumed, for a season, the character rather of a human, than of a divine institution.

Looking at the general result of these considerations, we find, that in so far as the church of Christ seeks to be one with Christ, rejoicing to obey his precepts, and yielding lovingly to his Spirit, it becomes great and powerful; while, on the other hand, when it admits into its bosom the vain or the corrupt, it sinks into insignificance; declines as to all its noblest powers; and appears on the very verge of misery and destruction.

The whole history of the church proves the truth of this view of its nature, and of the relation in which its members stand to Christ. Particular questions of theology; points of discipline; the rights and privileges of different members of the church; all these things may be considered, and found to possess a certain degree of importance; but the soul and body of the church are of Christ. Where Christ is, all is substantially safe: where Christ is not, whatever be the form, or the dogmas of the supposed religion, there is no communion of saints: there is no CHURCH!

CHAPTER XI.

STATE OF THE CHURCH AT THE END OF THE FOURTH CENTURY
 —THE LAST STRUGGLES OF PAGANISM—ST. AUGUSTINE'S
 REPLY TO THE ACCUSATIONS OF ITS ADVOCATES—ST. CHRYS-
 OSTOM—SKETCH OF HIS LIFE

THE conclusion of the fourth century was unhappily disturbed by controversies which indicated the rapid growth of a worldly spirit in the church and the clergy. Everything, at this period, favoured the rising power and independence of the Christians, as opposed to the still blinded champions of the old religion. Theodosius had no sooner gained the sole sovereignty of the vast domains which constituted the Roman empire, than he commenced those operations so formidable to paganism, which eventually stripped every temple and altar of its ancient glory. At the second general council, held at Constantinople in 381, he proclaimed conversion to any of the forms of heathenism a crime against the state. But when he visited Rome in the year 394, he effected even more by his persuasions and entreaties, than could be accomplished by laws and decrees. Rome had proved itself obstinately faithful to the worship of the gods. This cannot, however, be attributed to the influence of that powerful sentiment of erring enthusiasm and piety which distinguished the Romans of the times of the republic. The awe with which their superstition inspired them produced the fruits of a devoted patriotism—horror of perjury, and many domestic

virtues. Some connexion might be traced between the moral parts of the system and the tradition of primitive truth. But the paganism of later times retained little more than the basest parts of what had been added to the ancient systems. Even the mysteries imported from Egypt seem to have been cherished for no other purpose than that of encouraging a dark licentiousness. When Christianity, therefore, was opposed, and the several classes of heathen superstition were resolutely defended by many of the principal inhabitants of Rome, it was because the former would have crushed the vices in which they were basely indulging, while the latter gave every encouragement to their unlimited indulgence. Christianity held up the mirror not only to their superstition and their immorality, but to their degraded condition as citizens. Its pure and lofty spirit, its precepts teaching the duties of self-denial and active social virtues, would have brought them back to the state of their forefathers in respect to public honour and devotion ; while it would have founded their patriotism on an eternal basis, and mingled this, as every other virtue, with the love of God.

Notwithstanding the efforts of Theodosius and his immediate successors, the remains of paganism were still long after to be seen in the western parts of the empire. Like the roots of ancient trees in a forest, which though the hugh trunks be felled, will still cumber the ground till time wastes them away, the undershoots of superstition resisted the most sweeping attacks of imperial power. In the middle of the fifth century, and when the last melancholy effort was made to resist the rushing tide of barbarism, the expiring spirit of the old religions whispered to its fainting devotees, that their terror and misfortunes were but the consequence of their want of fidelity to the gods ;

or that they were sharers in calamities which would never have existed, had not the worshippers of Jupiter forsaken his shrines to bow the knee at the cross of Christ.

The bold, but not always judicious, attempts made by the clergy to annihilate the visible relics of superstition, provoked a fiercer determination on the part of the popular advocates of paganism, to preserve what they vainly believed to be connected with the early glory of their country. By many of the more credulous and fanatical of the people, it was asserted, that the calamities which had lately scourged the empire might be ascribed to the toleration of Christianity. It was to meet this charge that St. Augustine wrote his work *De Civitate Dei*, "On the City of God." This celebrated production was commenced about the year 413, but was not finished till twelve or thirteen years after. Many of the arguments and illustrations which its great author brings forward, owed their force to the peculiar acuteness with which they were applied to the temper of heathen minds. But there is enough in the treatise of what belongs to all ages, and to human nature at large, to render it one of the most valuable works of antiquity.

No man was more likely than Augustine to yield, on the one side, to the impulses of imagination, or to contend, on the other, for the sufficiency of human reason. But the spiritual illumination of the gospel had enabled him to discover the truth, even in matters connected with the common history of mankind. No better illustration, perhaps, could be gathered from the writings of the fathers than that which this work of St. Augustine affords, of the power of the gospel to give knowledge, and the ability to reason correctly on the affairs of empires. Thus, in the fourth book, he shows that the enlargement of

the Roman dominion could not be ascribed to the heathen gods ; that no empire which owed, like that of Rome, its increase to war, could properly be accounted happy ; that great empires without justice, were but great robberies ; and that the one true God alone is the dispenser of the kingdoms of the earth.

In the following book he proves that the greatness of empires arises neither from chance, nor from the conjunction of the stars, and with a noble superiority to the long-prevailing belief of the world, he refutes the main principles of judicial astrology. Not rejecting the notion of a destiny, if by that term he meant a series and concatenation of all causes which God foresaw from eternity, he speaks of the danger of applying a term, the sense of which may be so easily misunderstood. God's foreknowledge and the certainty of the events which he foresees, are, according to him, not inconsistent with the freedom of the human will. Then inquiring into the real cause of the successes which had attended the Romans in their ancient wars, he states his belief, that they might be attributed to their moral virtues, which God rewarded, according to their desert, with temporal glory.

While, therefore, the only actual grandeur of the Roman empire was to be ascribed to the virtues of its people, its decline could not with any reason be charged upon the introduction of Christianity. The arguments of St. Augustine wrought, it is probable, upon many an ingenuous mind in secret ; upon many a heart seeking, with agonizing solicitude, to solve the problem involved in the awful breaking up of the mighty edifice which rested, it had been supposed, on the unchanging decrees of the gods. Unhappily, the ambition of the higher clergy, the disputatious temper of large sections of the

Christian church, and the low tone of feeling becoming more and more prevalent, deprived the most sincere and eloquent defenders of the gospel of the argument which consists in an appeal to the virtues of its professors. But amid the growing confusion of the times, when controversy was raging in the East, and the West was threatened with the invasion of barbarous hordes, there were characters created, moulded, and glorified by the power of the gospel, the admirable features of which still shine resplendent in the records of the early church.

Of these none claim greater respect than St. John Chrysostom. This great and holy man died at the beginning of the fifth century,* after a life of most profitable labour as a preacher of the gospel. He lost his father, an officer of very high rank in the imperial army, while he was still an infant. His mother devoted herself with pious earnestness to the cultivation of his mind and character. The most eminent men of the age were employed in his instruction ; and his natural ability afforded ample encouragement to their labours. Antioch, his native city, was at that time distinguished as the seat of learning and refinement. Under the celebrated Libanius, Chrysostom acquired his first knowledge of philosophy and rhetoric. Thus the foundation was laid of that remarkable oratorical power, which, combined with the noblest endowments of mind and spirit, gained for him the name of Chrysostom, or the Golden-tongued. Such was the esteem which Libanius entertained for his genius, that, being asked on his death-bed, whom he wished to succeed him in his school ? he answered, “ John ; if the Christians had not stolen him from us.”

* At the age of about fifty-two.

Having finished his studies in philosophy and rhetoric, he took the usual course of the accomplished young men of his times, and pleaded causes publicly in the forum. But God intended him for other labours. Turning his attention to the study of the Scriptures, he found that divine truth alone could satisfy his heart ; that if he was to be either happy or eminently useful, he must resign his whole heart to the influence with which it was already operating upon his thoughts. He found several excellent persons ready to sympathize with him in these sentiments. Among these St. Basil was the foremost ; and, following his example, he resolved to break through all the trammels of the world, to overcome all the remaining yearnings of ambition, and separate himself for ever to the great work of salvation.

But there was an obstacle to his retiring from the world more difficult to overcome than any of the enticements of ambition or pleasure. His mother, though endowed with many virtues, had not a piety sufficiently exalted to enable her to contemplate the self-denying devotion of her son without alarm. One day, when her anxiety on the subject was at its height, she made him sit down by her side, and thus addressed him : " Son," she said, " it was but a little time that God allowed me the happiness of enjoying the conversation of your excellent and virtuous father. The same blow made you an orphan and me a widow, and brought upon me those troubles and miseries of a widowed state, which none can rightly understand but they who feel them No considerations have prevailed with me to alter my condition, and bring a second husband into your father's house. I have been content to be tossed in the storm and tempest ; and, being assisted by a power from above,

have not declined the sufferings of this iron furnace. Great comfort has it been to me, amid all my hardships, daily to behold your face, and thus to have continually before my eyes the lively image, the perfect character and resemblance of your deceased father. This it was which, while you were yet a tender infant, made me look upon you with perpetual satisfaction and delight. Nor can you lay it to my charge, that to relieve the trials of widowhood I have wasted your paternal inheritance. No ! I have preserved it entire, and yet not spared any cost to give you such an education as may raise you to esteem and reputation in the world. The charges for all this I have defrayed out of my own estate. Think not that I say this to upbraid. The only kind requital which I ask of you is, not to involve me in a second widowhood ; not to revive my buried grief. Stay but till I am gone ; it will, probably, not be long. For those that are young there is the hope that they may arrive at old age ; but for us who are already advanced in years, nothing remains but the continual expectation of death. When, therefore, you have committed me to the earth, and laid mine beside your father's bones, travel where you will, cross what seas you wish, there will be no one left to hinder you—but while I live let one home contain us. Provoke not God against you by afflicting your mother, who has not deserved it at your hands. If you think you have this against me, that I have troubled you with secular affairs, and forced you to look after your temporal concerns, regard not the law of nature, let not education, converse, or aught sway with you, but regard me as an enemy, and a subverter of your happiness. If, however, it shall appear, that I have so transacted all affairs, that you have been able to enjoy an easy and undisturbed course

of life, let this, though there were nothing else, induce you to remain with me. For, however many may love your company, none can so minister to your ease and freedom, nor can any be so anxious to cherish your credit and reputation as your mother."

But while the anxious and affectionate parent was thus striving to keep her son from embracing the life of an ascetic, many of the most influential men in the church were forming their plans for making him an active and useful member of the ministry. The report of their intentions reached his ears. At that time the office of presbyter, or bishop, was invested with a grandeur and mystery, which deterred even serious minds from daring to encounter its responsibilities. Chrysostom earnestly wished his friend Basil to become a minister of the church. By a species of pious fraud he concealed his own feelings, lest by his backwardness to take the yoke he might increase the apprehensions of his friend. Basil having allowed himself to be ordained, hastened to Chrysostom, expecting to find him either already consecrated, or preparing for the sacred rite. Chrysostom now told his friend all his fears and struggles; explained to him how conscious he was of his inability to perform properly the weighty functions of a presbyter; and how greatly he desired to be left free to watch over his own soul, and perfect himself by the undisturbed exercises of devotion. Basil rebuked him with the severity of friendship, vexed at finding itself alone in the encounter of solemn responsibilities. Chrysostom defended himself with ingenuity and tenderness. The substance of the conversation between the friends is given in Chrysostom's celebrated treatise *De Sacerdotio*, "On the Priesthood,"

Soon after this, Chrysostom retired to a monastery

situated among the mountains, not far from Antioch. There he became acquainted with an aged ascetic, distinguished for his virtues and wisdom. With this holy man he continued for about four years, practising all those methods of self-control and humiliation which were then beginning to be thought essential to the perfecting of the Christian character. This period was followed by another of still greater solitude and devotion. But it must not be passed lightly over, that during all this time Chrysostom was not merely exercising himself in the painful practices of asceticism : he was a most diligent and anxious student of Scripture. Separate from the world, undisturbed by its cares or its temptations, he devoted the whole force of his powerful genius to the examination of divine truth at its very source. Whatever, therefore, may be thought of the method which he employed to prepare himself against the assaults of Satan, there can be little doubt, that the perfect retirement and leisure which he enjoyed for six or seven years in early life, employed as it was in the study of the Bible, contributed essentially to the success which he subsequently enjoyed as a preacher of the gospel. He had time to let the great things which he read sink deep into his heart. Sudden impressions ; startling discoveries ; new lights ; all those things so common to ardent minds in the hasty study of Scripture, were, in the case of this retired and patient inquirer, tried by a profound, unwearied, praying spirit. What he thought to-day must abide the strict judgment of the morrow. What the glowing feeling, the exalted, rapture-like reverie generated, could not be allowed to take its place among the possessions of the soul till it had passed and repassed through the furnace.

Having returned to Antioch, he was in due time or-

dained reader, deacon, and at length, against his own wish, it is said, presbyter. The lofty views which he entertained of this office, and his consequent dread of undertaking its duties, are strikingly exhibited in his work on the subject. "Though the priesthood," he says, "be exercised upon earth, it ought to be reckoned among heavenly possessions; for neither man, nor angel, nor archangel, nor any created power, but the Holy Ghost himself, established that sacred order, and made men think that they exercised a ministry of angels in a mortal body. Hence, he who is exalted to the priesthood, ought to be as pure as if he were already in heaven, among those blessed spirits."

The language which he further employs both on the character of the priesthood, and on the nature of the mysteries with which it is concerned, is so bold and lofty, that few readers in these times, would fail to be startled by it. No doubt, however, can exist but that it proceeded from a most reverential admiration of divine things; and that if expressions were employed which it would now seem dangerous to use, it was never even remotely supposed by the devout Chrysostom that they might one day be quoted in support of human ambition, human extravagances, or human errors.

But it was not only his fears of the responsibility attending the priesthood in itself, which deterred him from willingly accepting the dignity. The growing corruptions of the church, the uncertain character of the age, created additional terrors. "A bishop," he says, "is more agitated with cares, than the sea with winds and storms. The first rock he meets with is vain-glory, anger, peevishness, envy, quarrelling, calumnies, accusations, lying, hypocrisies, treachery; precipitate violence against the innocent; joy to

see those who serve the church neglect their duty, and sorrow to see them discharge it worthily; love of praise; desire of honour—one of the most pernicious passions of the soul; discourses which aim rather at pleasing than profiting the hearers; servile flatterers; base complacency; contempt of the poor; degenerate civilities towards rich men; favours ill bestowed, and hence as hurtful to the giver as to the receiver; guilty fear; bashfulness in speaking; false modesty; silence; cowardice; and fear of reproving great men.”

This is an awful catalogue of the trials and snares to be encountered by the clergy of that still almost primitive period. It accords but sadly with the eloquent author's own theoretical view of the priesthood, which, had it been just what he describes it, would have soared high above so earthly and sensual a region of temptation. But he adds: “There is no slavery equal to ours. We are even made to degrade ourselves to please the women. They have now such power that they give and take away bishoprics to whom and from whom they please. Hence it is, that all things are turned upside down. Those who should obey are become the directors of those who should command. I do not, however, pretend to charge all bishops with the crimes now mentioned. There are many who have not been caught in these snares. Their number far exceeds that of those who have fallen into the temptation. Nor will I say that the episcopal dignity is the cause of these evils. Far be it from me to entertain so wild a thought. The sword is not the cause of murder, nor wine of drunkenness. All wise men accuse and punish such as abuse God's gifts, as the true authors of those abuses. So far is the episcopal dignity from being guilty of these corruptions, that it may rather complain that men do not

exercise it well. We are those whom it may upbraid ; for we dishonour it as much as in us lies when we admit the first that comes, and who, not having examined their own strength, or considered the greatness and importance of the office, receive it the instant it is offered. But, blinded with darkness, they are no sooner called upon to act than they involve their people in a thousand disorders. For, from whence, think you, arise the numerous troubles which now afflict the church ? I see no other source of these disorders but the want of circumspection, and the exercise of a proper choice in the election of bishops." In reference to this last observation, he remarks, in another place : " Every kind of pretence is made for promoting men to high offices in the church. One will have this man because he is of a noble family ; another votes for some one else because he is rich ; and a third, to advance his friend or relation. No man chooses the most worthy ; no one has respect either to virtue or merit."

The ministry of Chrysostom at Antioch required the exercise of all his powers and fortitude. Not many years after his admission to the priesthood, a violent sedition broke out among the people. Misery threatened them on all sides. They had provoked the just indignation of the emperor ; and every hour seemed about to be the last of their beautiful and wealthy city. In this state of things, Chrysostom rejoiced to employ the power of divine argument to convince the people of their generally sinful state ; to show them the way to peace and safety, by seeking the mercy of God ; and to confirm them, if possible, in the resolutions of sincere repentance. The sermons which he preached on this occasion are among the most valuable of his works, and prove how

deeply conversant he was with the wants of the human heart.

In the year 397 the see of Constantinople became vacant by the death of Nectarius. One of the emperor's great officers, Eutropius, had, in the course of his visits to Antioch, on public business, learned to admire the virtues and the eloquence of Chrysostom. He strenuously advised the emperor to appoint him to the vacant dignity ; and to take such measures as might secure his exaltation before rival aspirants should find an opportunity of interfering with so useful a design. The emperor listened gladly to the advise of his minister. Letters were dispatched to the governor of the East. He was directed to convey Chrysostom with great secrecy to the border of his province, where the imperial escort would be in readiness to conduct him to Constantinople. It is worth observing, as characteristic of the times, and as indicative of the great worth of Chrysostom's teaching, that all these arrangements were rendered necessary by the fear that the people of Antioch would obstinately, and even violently, resist the removal of their favourite preacher. Asterius, the governor, performed his duty with politic caution. Taking Chrysostom in his carriage one day, and representing that he desired to consult him on some private matters, he drove him some miles out of Antioch, and then delivered him to the emperor's officers. He was rapidly conveyed to Constantinople. The emperor had prepared an assembly of bishops to celebrate his entrance. One, however, and the chief of the congregated prelates, beheld his elevation with scorn and jealousy. This was Theophilus of Alexandria. He discovered, it is said, in the very features of Chrysostom, a grandeur and determination of character which threatened

a formidable resistance to his own worldly and sensual ambition.

Chrysostom was no sooner introduced to the duties of his exalted office, than he began a series of reforms, which, while they proved his acute observation, his piety, and knowledge of human nature, demonstrated no less the awful state into which natural corruption, or intended wickedness, had plunged the church.

It must be a cold heart indeed, and still more a wretchedly debased Christianity, which would refuse the meed of admiration to the noble devotedness with which Chrysostom set himself in opposition to the prevalent vices of his age. While he spared none of the corruptions which are as common to the poor as the rich, he levelled the weightiest of his blows against the great and the wealthy. So truly universal and free from unholy prejudices was this great man, that he never allowed his charity to be limited by conventional or private feelings. Whether high or low, the wicked were reproved by his solemn denunciations ; and so too, whether high or low, they were defended by his eloquent appeals against the outbreaks of violence and passion. This was remarkably the case in the instance of the unhappy Eutropius. To him he owed his elevation to the see of Constantinople ; and it now happened that he could do more by his eloquence to aid the degraded minister, than the latter had ever been able, except as the minister of Divine Providence, to do in favour of Chrysostom. Eutropius was regarded by the populace with inconceivable hatred. Deprived of his dignity and his wealth ; hunted like a wild beast from place to place ; feeling every moment as his last ; and knowing that thousands were thirsting for his blood ; he at length fled into the

church of St. Sophia. Chrysostom beheld him crouching before the altar. He heard the shouts of the populace crying for vengeance. Unmoved, except by pity, he ascended the pulpit—that pulpit from which he had never spoken without inspiring respect and awe. He had no time for preparation ; but his heart and his mind were full ; and as the angry and impatient multitude thronged into the church, he thus addressed them :—

“ In every period of our lives, but more especially in the present, we may exclaim, ‘ Vanity of vanities ! all is vanity ! ’ Where now are the costly insignia of the consulship, and where the blaze of the torches ? Where now is the enthusiasm of applause, and the festive dance, and the sumptuous banquet, and the crowded levee ? Where are the crowns and canopies ? Where is the tumult that echoed through the city, the acclamations which resounded in the hippodromes, and the flattery of the spectators ? All these are fled. The rising storm has scattered the rich foliage on the ground, presenting to our eyes the tree stripped, naked, quivering to its roots. So vehement was the blast, so infuriate the hurricane, that it threatened to tear up the very depths of the proud foundation, and to rend the nerves and vitals of the tree. Where now are the fictitious friends ? Where the carousals and the feasts ? Where the swarm of parasites ; the streaming goblets of exhaustless wine, the arts which administered to luxury, the worshippers of the consular authority, whose words and actions were the slaves of interest ? They were the vision of a night, and the illusion of a dream ; but when the day returned, they were blotted from existence : they were flowers of the spring ; but when the spring departed, they were all withered : they were a shadow, and it passed away : they were a

smoke, and it was dissolved : they were bubbles of water, and they were broken : they were a spider's web, and it was torn. Let us then repeat again and again this spiritual saying, 'Vanity of vanities ! all is vanity !' This saying should be inscribed on your garments ; in the forum ; in our houses ; on our doors ; and on the thresholds. And yet, far more should it be engraven on each man's conscience, and be made a theme of ceaseless meditation."

Turning then to the unhappy Eutropius, the preacher, deeply affected, we cannot but believe, exclaimed, "Lo ! experience has proved to thee that wealth is not only an ungrateful servant, but a destroyer of man. It is this which hath undone thee, which hath laid thee grovelling in the dust. When thou wert so oft indignant because I declared the truth, did I not maintain that I felt a sincerer friendship for thee than they did who flattered thee ? That whilst I reprehended, I was more solicitous for thy welfare than they were whose only object it was to gratify thy passions ? Did I not observe, that the wound inflicted by a friend, is more worthy of regard than the kisses of an enemy ? * * * Far different our practice to thine. In the full climax of thine enormities, we braved thy fury ; and now that thou art fallen, we cover thee with our mantle, and tender thee our service.* The church, unrelentingly besieged, hath spread wide her arms, and pressed thee to her bosom ; while the theatres, those idols of thy soul, which so oft have drawn down thy vengeance upon us, have betrayed—have abandoned thee !"

Then turning to the tumultuous congregation, the preacher continued : "When this assembly shall be dissolved, will ye have the hardihood to approach the mys-

teries, and to repeat that prayer, in which we are commanded to say, 'Forgive us, even as we forgive our debtors,' whilst ye are exacting justice of your debtor? 'Have not his enormities been excessive?' I admit the charge. But this is a season of mercy, not of judgment; of remission, not of accusation; of indulgence, not of scrutiny; of grace and favour, not of trial and condemnation. 'I will have mercy,' says God, 'and not sacrifice.' And ye may perceive that in every part of the sacred writings, He is always demanding this, and declaring that this is the remission of transgressions. If this then be our course, what a cloud of blessings will encircle us! We shall render the Almighty propitious to ourselves; we shall escape the chastisement of our sins: we shall irradiate the church with glory."

The appeal which Chrysostom thus made to the feelings of the people was successful. They knew that Eutropius had actually employed his power to annul the law which converted the altar of the church into a sanctuary. But, hating him as they did for his tyrannical conduct, and his numerous vices, they did not refuse to obey the voice of Chrysostom. The degraded and terrified minister was allowed to remain by the altar. Supplications in his behalf were addressed to the emperor, and instead of being condemned to the scaffold, or dragged to pieces by the populace, he was merely banished to the island of Cyprus.*

Exalted as was Chrysostom's position in the church, his talents and personal character tended still more to enlarge the sphere of his influence. Few of the great

* The unhappy man was, however, brought back sometime after, and tried on a new accusation. He was finally condemned to be beheaded.

events of that period, whether pertaining to ecclesiastical or civil affairs, took place without calling forth the exercise of his abilities, or his piety. But the loftier and more devoted the temper of a churchman in those times, the more he stood exposed to the hatred and attacks of prevailing factious. Chrysostom's power was particularly shown in the punishment of unworthy and licentious bishops. Thus in the year 401, he presided at a council held at Ephesus, and sentenced six prelates to deposition on account of their vices, or violation of the ordinances of the church. .

His dispute with Theophilus of Alexandria was the most important and perilous of those in which his zeal engaged him. But even in this he might have proved victorious, with little difficulty, had he not unfortunately provoked the anger of the Empress Eudoxia. In a popular discourse, he spoke at length of the follies and irregularities of women. The empress, jealously alive to any supposed rebuke of her vices, immediately conceived the most inveterate hatred to Chrysostom. Plans were soon formed for his ruin. Theophilus, his sworn enemy, was invited to Constantinople. He came attended by a numerous company of bishops, and especially by those who had been deposed by Chrysostom.

Nothing could exceed the frivolity of the articles framed into the form of an accusation against the patriarch. The most conspicuous were, that he had spoken contemptuously of the clergy. Summoned to appear before the pretended synod, he resolutely refused to acknowledge their canonical right to judge him. Many were the efforts made to overcome his determination in this respect ; but he preferred enduring the worst, to exposing himself to the charge of sacrificing his independence as patriarch of Constantinople. Calling around him the

bishops in whose fidelity he could confide, he thus addressed them : “ Brethren, be earnest in prayer ; and as you love the Lord Jesus, let none of you, for my sake, desert his charge. For, as it was in St. Paul’s case, ‘ I am ready to be offered ; and the time of my departure is at hand.’ I see plainly that I must endure many hardships, and then quit this troublesome life. For I know the subtilty of Satan, who cannot endure to be daily tormented with my preaching. Hereby you will find mercy at the hands of God : only be mindful of me in your prayers.” Seeing his brethren much affected at his discourse, he added, after a short pause : “ Brethren, sit down, and cease to weep, unless you wish to add more affliction to my grief. ‘ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.’ If your memories serve you, call to mind how I always told you, that this life is a way, on which both joys and sorrows, march with rapid strides. The scene of things before our eyes is like a fair, where we buy and sell, and sometimes recreate and divert ourselves. Are we better than the patriarchs ? Do we excel the prophets, and the apostles, that we should live here for ever ?”

As might have been expected, the synod decreed that Chrysostom was guilty of the things laid to his charge, and sentenced him to deposition. A more iniquitous proceeding never took place ; and nothing could exceed the indignation of the people when they found that their patriarch was to be banished at the instance of men so unjustly constituted his judges. Assembling round the church and his residence, they resolved to oppose any attempt to carry him off. A sanguinary conflict would probably have been the result of this determination on the part of the people ; but Chrysostom, anxious for the quiet of the city, and the safety of its inhabitants,

escaped their affectionate vigilance, and on the third day delivered himself into the hands of the imperial guard. Being conveyed on ship-board, he was carried to a village in Bithynia, and might there have been left to pass many years in exile and inactivity. But the clergy, and the chief portion of the people, were no sooner made acquainted with his departure, than they rose tumultuously, insisted on shutting the churches, and threatened universal confusion. An earthquake happening during the night succeeding Chrysostom's departure, the empress herself was filled with alarm. Fear soon prevailed over every other feeling. Many of those who looked with indifference on the proceedings, or who at first rejoiced that so severe a censurer of their worldly habits was banished, now began to question the justice of his condemnation. All parties, indeed, except Theophilus and his faction, felt that no time ought to be lost in bringing back the patriarch. Eudoxia urged the emperor to take instant measures for the purpose. Messengers were accordingly dispatched; and such, it is said, was the urgency of Eudoxia, that the passage of the Bosphorus was crowded with boats engaged in carrying messengers to secure the accomplishment of her wishes. She even condescended to excuse herself to Chrysostom; and to plead, that it was solely the fault of wicked and corrupt men that he had been driven into exile; that she honoured him as her bishop; and regarded him with profound affection as the person who had baptized and regenerated her children.

Thus Chrysostom was restored to his see. But neither his lofty piety, nor the suspicious pride of Eudoxia, would allow of his remaining long in quiet. Encouraging, as the empress did, both the follies and the supersti-

tions of the people, she regarded every severe expression which Chrysostom uttered from the pulpit against the vices of women, as levelled against herself. Means were soon found for satisfying her resentment. His enemies suggested, that, having been deposed, he ought not to have resumed the duties of his office till the sentence of deposition had been formally reversed. This Chrysostom had himself virtually acknowledged. But it was not true that he had of his own accord returned to his diocese, or recommenced his labours without due authority. In an assembly, convened soon after his return, sixty-five bishops had solemnly voted for his restoration. It was in vain, however, to resist the determination of his enemies. The emperor grew weary of the importunities of the faction, resolved on the ruin of the patriarch ; and, in order to save himself from further annoyance, directed him to give up his church. Chrysostom answered : “ I have received this church from God my Saviour ; and am intrusted with the care of these people’s souls. I cannot desert this charge. But if you be resolved upon such a measure, the civil power is yours. Expel me by force ; that I may, at least, plead your authority for the non-performance of my duty.”

No violence was practised against him. He received orders to confine himself to his house, and take no share in the services of the church. The latter part of the command he could not, it appears, with a safe conscience obey. At the solemn season of Lent, the order was repeated, and Good-Friday was chosen, as unwisely as impiously, for the execution of the emperor’s command. No fewer than forty bishops had met together to enjoy the celebration of the sacred season with Chrysostom. Full of grief at finding so great and good a man ; so noble a

champion of sound doctrine and pure discipline, exposed to the machinations of heartless enemies, they hastened in a body to the emperor and empress, and, bathed in tears, besought them not to deprive the church of its chief pastor at a time when the catechumens, instructed in the faith, were expecting baptism. When the venerable men saw that their entreaties were of no avail, one of them, Paul, Bishop of Croatia, addressing the empress, exclaimed, "Eudoxia, fear God ; have compassion on your own children, and do not profane Christ's holy festival with blood-shedding."

But even this was in vain ; and the bishops returned overwhelmed with sorrow at the melancholy prospects of the church. The greater part of Chrysostom's congregation had, in the mean time, assembled in the baptistery, in the hope of being able to fulfil there the sacred duties of the evening. But they were attacked by a band of soldiers, who tore them out, inflicted many wounds on those who attempted to defend themselves, and spared neither age nor sex in their desire to execute the will of those by whom they were employed. It was the time when vast numbers of catechumens had been admitted to baptism. They were among the crowds who now sought on every side, to save themselves by flight. It is said, that the emperor, riding the next day into the country, was astonished to see a meadow, at some distance, covered, as it seemed, with a white veil. On inquiring what it was, his attendants told him that a vast assemblage of heretics was collected there, and that they were now engaged in performing some of the rites so hateful to the church. The emperor immediately gave orders for the soldiers to disperse them. A variety of infamous cruelties attended the performance of this command. Many of the

innocent catechumens were seized and cast into prison. The scourge was applied to force them to renounce their bishop ; but every species of injury was calmly borne by his faithful people. The suffering of all others, perhaps, felt most painfully, was that which Chrysostom endured in his own heart to see his devoted flock thus wickedly persecuted.

Unable any longer to endure such a state of things, Chrysostom made an appeal to Innocent, the then Pope of Rome, and the other bishops of the west. His great enemy, however, Theophilus of Alexandria, had already taken measures to prevent, if possible, any interference in Chrysostom's behalf. One of his clergy having been sent to Rome, declared that the patriarch was deposed, and entreated the pontiff to hold no communion with him or his party. But a few days after this, letters arrived from Chrysostom himself, from forty of the bishops in his neighbourhood, and the main body of the clergy of Constantinople. Innocent, not fully understanding the real merits of the dispute, declared his resolution to preserve communion with both parties ; but upon having the acts of the synod which had pretended to depose Chrysostom laid before him, and finding Theophilus persevering in his violent course, he acquainted him with his sense of the injustice perpetrated against the patriarch, and added : " If you dare abide by the judgment which you have passed, make your appearance before a synod, to be assembled according to the laws of Christ, and there bring forth your accusations, and prosecute the charge according to the canons of the Nicene Council, (for of no other rule does the Church of Rome allow,) and you will thereby gain unquestionable strength and security to your cause."

But it was not consistent with the wishes of Theophilus, or the other enemies of Chrysostom, to proceed according to the upright suggestions of the Roman pontiff. Instead, therefore, of yielding to his counsels, they resolved to pursue their own infamous plans. More than one assassin now attacked the life of the great and good man whose virtues had provoked their hatred. When they found that the hand of Divine Providence shielded him from their weapons, they resolved to accomplish their object by a direct appeal to the fears, or the jealousies, of the emperor and Eudoxia. In this, by some unaccountable weakness on the part of the former, they succeeded. The imperial edict was issued for his immediate banishment. When Chrysostom received it, he said to such of the bishops and others of the clergy as were at hand, "Come, let us go pray, and join forces with the guardian angel of this church." Passing secretly, to avoid creating a tumult, into the baptistery, he called for the deaconesses, and said, "Come hither, daughters, and hearken to what I say. The things that concern me, have, I perceive, an end. I have finished my course, and perhaps you will see my face no more. This is that which I earnestly beg of you, — that none of you lay aside your accustomed care and diligence towards the church. If any one that is unwilling, shall be ordained to this place, and shall be chosen by common consent and not ambitiously seek it, submit to him as if it were myself. For the church cannot be without a bishop. Thus shall you obtain mercy. Be mindful of me in your prayers."

The tears and lamentations of those who were thus acquainted with his departure moved him deeply ; but he strengthened himself with the reflections proper to such a heart as his. "Will the empress," he said to himself,

“banish me? Let her banish me; for the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof. If she command that I be cut in pieces, let me be sawn asunder; for the prophet Isaiah was so treated. Will she cast me into the sea? I remember it was the fate of Jonah. Or into a fiery furnace? I shall have the three children for my fellow-sufferers. If she will cast me to wild beasts, I think how Daniel went the same way to the lions. If she command me to be stoned, let it be so; I have Stephen the protomartyr on my side. Will she have my head? Let her take it; John the Baptist lost his. Has she a mind to my estate? Let her have it; naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither.”*

Such were the noble expressions of fortitude and resignation with which Chrysostom placed himself under the charge of the guards appointed to conduct him, and began his painful journey towards Bithynia. But scarcely had he left the church when an awful conflagration broke out, and in the space of three hours laid almost the whole of the superb structure in ruins. Consternation seized all parties. The enemies, however, of Chrysostom soon forgot every other feeling in the desire to turn the event to their own interest. Excited as the mass of the people were, it was easy to persuade them to believe, that the noble building had been set on fire by the friends of the banished patriarch. Strange to say, this wicked accusation was made the ground of a new charge against Chrysostom himself. Another patriarch was now appointed. Arsacius, brother to Nectarius, who enjoyed the dignity previous to Chrysostom, obtained the office. He was now

* It is thus he describes his emotions in his 125th Epistle.

near eighty years of age ; of a quiet temper, and but humble talent. The devoted followers of Chrysostom resisted every attempt employed to make them acknowledge another prelate. Hence they were termed *Johannites* ; and the church at Constantinople now unhappily presented the worst features of dissension and schism. On the side of Arsacius, the most cruel tyranny was exercised against the friends of Chrysostom. Imprisonment, the scourge, and other species of torture awaited those who espoused his cause. The only defence which the latter could employ, consisted in appeals to the justice of the emperor ; in secret meetings ; and in efforts to interest the most powerful of the western churches in behalf of Chrysostom.

The head of the Roman church was not ignorant of the real nature of the case. Innocent sympathized with the afflictions of the exiled patriarch ; and his letter with the inscription, "To our dear brother, John, Innocent sendeth greeting," affords good proof of the right-mindedness of the pontiff. "Although," he says, "an innocent person may expect all prosperity and success, and ought to seek mercy and compassion from God, yet we deemed it fitting to write these letters, which we have sent by Cyriacus, the deacon, as persuasives to patience ; lest otherwise the malice of enemies should be more powerful to oppress, than a good conscience to animate and confirm your hope. For you who are the pastor and teacher of so great a charge, are not to be taught, that in all ages the best of men are very often tried whether they will keep up the strength and vigour of their patience, or tamely sink under the evils and hardships which befall them. And conscience is doubtless the firmest pillar to support our minds under all the miseries and oppressions

to which we are unjustly exposed ; and which, unless subdued by an invincible patience, may inspire others with the suspicion that our cause is bad. Nothing is too difficult for that man to bear, who can, in the first place, repose his trust in God ; and, in the next, find peace and satisfaction in his own conscience. A good man may be exercised and trained up to patience, but he cannot be overcome if he have the Holy Scriptures at hand, as fortresses to defend and preserve him. For the divine lessons which we expound to the people abound in examples to this purpose. They set before us almost all the saints that ever existed as subject to manifold afflictions, and as approved in a school of suffering, before they arrived at the crown and recompense of their patience. Therefore, dear brother, let the conscience of your innocency, which, under all calamities, is never destitute of the consolations that naturally flow from virtue, comfort and stay your mind ; for so long as our great Lord and Master has his eye upon us, a pure and unspotted conscience will land us in the haven of tranquillity and peace."

The pontiff addressed another letter to the clergy and people of Constantinople. One point in this epistle is of great importance to the student of church history. Innocent, in reproving the authors of the agitation, earnestly reminds them, that while they were referring to canons passed in this, or that synod, it was the great duty of faithful and sincere Christians, to content themselves with the decrees of the council of Nice, to lessen the authority of which had ever been the grand effort of heretics and schismatics. Thus we have again another most interesting and satisfactory proof, that the creed of the church was still what it was in the primitive times ;

that the golden circle had still the same centre and the same circumference ; and that while bold, corrupt, or ambitious men were ever by their agitations seeking to obscure the truth, it was still to the devout believer what it was when the church, in its first general assembly, drew its confession from the plain volume of Scripture.

While Constantinople was the scene of so much trouble and excitement, Chrysostom himself was pursuing his painful journey to the place of his banishment. This was Cucusus, an obscure town in Armenia, on the borders of Cilicia. The distance which he had to travel was very great, and his infirmities so many, that he frequently seemed on the point of sinking under the burden of his sufferings. In some of the larger towns through which he passed, both the people and the magistrates received him with the affection and respect due to this character. But the intervals of repose were rare ; and on the road he was exposed to all the brutality which characterized the fierce, rude soldiers which formed his guard.

Having at length reached Cucusus, he was comforted at finding that, bare and sterile as was the surrounding country, and far remote as was the town from the more civilized parts of the world, there were those in it whose hospitality and friendship might well compensate for all the pomp and grandeur of Constantinople. Even the very keenness of the climate, which he had so much dreaded, proved favourable to him. His sickness almost left him ; and he was enabled to enjoy the frequent company of the bishop and clergy of the district. As his health and spirits improved, his anxiety not to remain idle increased. Amid all his troubles, he retained his power as a preacher ; and the veneration in which he was held by

the bishop of the place afforded him ample opportunities of exercising his high and gracious vocation as a minister of the word. Multitudes of the people flocked to hear him ; and his discourses filled many a soul in that remote region with the treasures of divine truth. Nor was he, in the meantime, without the consolations of more ancient friendships. Several of his own clergy travelled all the way to Cucusus to enjoy his society, and minister to his comforts. Even one of his deaconesses, a very aged lady, named Sabiniana, despising all the difficulties and dangers of the way, proceeded to Cucusus, that she might watch over him. The more wealthy among his people manifested their devotion by furnishing him with large supplies of money. Such was the extent of these, their voluntary offerings, that Chrysostom was enabled to effect many of the objects which he had most earnestly desired to accomplish. Thus, he established a mission for the conversion of the Goths. In several places, destitute of the means of religious instruction, he erected churches ; and numerous were the Christians whom he ransomed from captivity among the barbarians.

The time employed in these works of charity and religion passed happily on. Though severely tried by the coldness of the winter in that inhospitable clime, Chrysostom recovered his health, in some degree, on the return of spring. But now a worse enemy appeared than the storms and inconveniences of the climate. The Isauri, a neighbouring tribe of barbarians, had long threatened the town. Their approach obliged Chrysostom, and most of the inhabitants, to take refuge among the woods and mountains. For a while he found safety and repose in the town of Arabissus ; but was soon obliged again to flee from the approaching enemy ; and in this way he

continued for nearly a year to wander, from place to place, through the wildest districts of the country.

During this painful season of his exile, he wrote to the Roman pontiff ; and his letter well describes the state of his feelings, and the sufferings to which he was exposed. " 'This body of ours,' he says, "is indeed confined to one place ; but the mind, borne on the wings of love, ranges through the world. Thus, though separated by so vast a distance, we are still near your piety ; converse with you every day ; and with the eyes of the soul behold the force of your spirit, your sincere affection, immutable constancy, and the abundant and never-failing consolation with which you minister to us. The higher the waves, the more numerous the rocks and quicksands which lurk beneath, the fiercer and more tempestuous the storms, so much the greater are your care and vigilance. Neither distance, nor length of time, nor perplexity of affairs, has lessened these, but you continue to imitate the most skilful pilots, who are then the most watchful when they see the waves rising, the sea beginning to rage and swell, the water rushing into the ship, and the day involved in midnight darkness. For this we return you many thanks, and desire no greater pleasure than the means of sending you continually whole packets of letters. But since the solitariness of this place denies us such consolation, (for not only are they hindered who come from you, but neither can they who dwell in these parts come to us ; for we are shut up in a most blind and remote corner of the world ; and thieves and robbers everywhere way-lay and infest the passengers,) we beg, that our long-continued silence may rather move your pity, than provoke you to charge us with neglect. Be assured of this—our silence is not the

consequence of disregard. Taking advantage, therefore, of an opportunity long waited for, the journey of the reverend and beloved presbyter, John, and Paul, the deacon, we have written to you, and think we cannot thank you enough for the kindness and compassion you have showed us, even beyond the tenderest affection of a father. As far as in you lies, you have taken care that all things be duly reformed and rectified, all scandals and disorders removed, and the churches settled in peace and a pleasant serenity ; that all things run in a proper channel ; and that neither the laws be subjected to contempt or force, nor the constitution of the ancient fathers violated. But there are those who have hindered the fulfilment of these designs ; and not content with what they have done heretofore, they have exceeded, by their late attempts, the wickedness of their former practices. I shall not venture to describe their proceedings ; a particular account whereof would exceed the limits, not of an epistle merely, but of a history. Still, confused and disordered as all things seem, and almost incapable of reformation, I beseech you to continue your efforts to reclaim them, and not to give up the business in despair, considering of what mighty importance it would be to bring it to a prosperous issue, the whole world being interested and concerned in the matter. The churches are wasted and brought low ; the people dispersed ; the clergy subdued and trampled on ; the bishops banished ; and the ecclesiastical canons trodden under foot. Once, therefore, and again, yea, and again, I beseech you to use your utmost care and diligence ; and the greater the storm is, let your study and endeavour be so much the more. For I have yet some hope that things may be brought to a good issue ; and if not, the merciful God

will prepare a crown for the reward of your labours, and those who suffer will receive no small comfort from the abundance of your charity. I am now in the third year of my banishment ; exposed to famine, pestilence, war ; to continual sieges ; to an incredible solitude and desolation ; to death every day ; and to the points of the Isaurian swords. In the midst of all these evils, great are the support and comfort derived from the interest which we have in your constant and inimitable affection ; from this freedom of addressing you ; from the refreshment bestowed by your ready and sincere charity. This is our fortress ; this is our security, our calm and quiet haven ; this is the treasury of a thousand good things ; our rejoicing ; and the spring of infinite pleasure and delight. And if, after all, we should be driven into a more desolate corner than that wherein we now are, it is this which would make us depart with a mighty consolation under all our sufferings."

The apprehension intimated by Chrysostom at the close of the above letter, was too well founded. Wretched as his abode had been for several months past, his enemies regarded him as still too safe and happy. Representing, therefore, the popularity which he enjoyed, as contrary to the proper state of an exiled bishop, they obtained an order from Constantinople for his banishment to the shores of the Pontic Sea ; a region so cold and desolate, that it had been for ages the place of banishment for only the most hated of offenders against the laws. The journey was soon commenced ; and it was pursued by his guards with a merciless haste, which proved too well that if he died on the way, their employers would be the better pleased. They had reached the borders of the Pontic region. The approach of night

obliged them to stop at a place where an oratory had been erected to the memory of Saint Basiliscus, a bishop who had suffered martyrdom in the reign of Maximinian. It is said that the martyr appeared to Chrysostom in a dream, and addressed him with the words, "Be of good comfort, brother ; for to-morrow we shall be together." Deeply impressed with the vision, Chrysostom the next morning entreated his guards to allow him to remain till eleven o'clock. But he entreated in vain, and was compelled to continue his journey as usual. They had travelled, however, only three or four miles, when he became so manifestly ill, that it was impossible for them to proceed. His guards accordingly carried him back to the oratory. Summoning what little strength remained to him, he changed his ordinary garments for a white vestment. He then received the communion ; and having prayed for a time, exclaimed, "Glory be to God for all things that happen : Amen." These were his last words, which having uttered, he happily fell asleep in the Lord Jesus.

Chrysostom died in the fifty-third year of his age, and the 407th of the Christian era. He had been bishop of Constantinople nine years and a half, more than three of which were passed in exile.

We may learn much from the life of this eminent man respecting the state of the church at the beginning of the fifth century. He fell a victim to the jealousy of opposing prelates. The power and wealth of many of the bishops were now so great, that nothing but the most profound love of divine truth, and the most ready submission to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, could have kept them free from the dominion of worldly passions. Exalted as they regarded themselves above all the rest of

the church, they surveyed each other with feelings that were hostile to every Christian virtue. When one or the other of their class sought by the purity of his life and doctrine to restore the primitive discipline, his degradation became necessary to those whose designs depended for success upon such contrary principles. This was one source of strife, unhappy alike in its consequences both to virtue and religion ; to the world and to the church. Another, still more abundant, was opened by the natural struggle between the pretensions to authority existing on the one hand, and those to independence on the other. The outward unity of the church seemed to rest on the concentration of power. Men, therefore, who had originally little ambition of their own, easily imbibed the passion as the ministers of an ecclesiastical dominion. Thus we often meet in the history of the church with characters which astonish us by their apparent inconsistencies. Christian meekness, Christian simplicity and holiness, shine, with indisputable lustre, in the personal bearing and sentiments of many of the prelates who appear on the field, where the great battle between rival churches was fought, clad in the very armour of bold, haughty, unyielding ambition.

The notion that the unity of the church could be best secured by the enlargement of particular sees, and the acknowledgment of their pre-eminent authority, was now daily gaining ground. There were many specious arguments in its favour. Unity was, had been, and ever must be, in the proper sense of the word, an acknowledged essential to the perfecting of the Christian church. But, at the same time, the freedom and independence of the bishops in their own dioceses, were not only necessary to their dignity, but in many respects, to the welfare of the

clergy generally, and to the peace and spiritual good of the people. Thus while one party contended for a supremacy extending over many churches, another strove to render each bishop supreme in his own particular sphere, above the control of others, except as he and all were subjected to the rule of faith, and the decision of a general council.

Such men as Athanasius and Chrysostom stood exposed, amid these conflicting interests, to the most painful trials. They were sufficiently high in rank, and at the same time sufficiently holy and devout to feel the whole burden of the twofold struggle. Their time, their rare talents and energies, their spiritual graces, were all either expended or endangered in the conflict. By the providence and the blessing of God, the grand results of their study and experience were preserved by the sermons which they preached, and the works which they wrote. In this respect, the church has still to rejoice that, worn down as these great men often were by injuries and persecutions, they retained, throughout their lives, the fullest understanding of the truth by which alone the people of God can really attain to unity, even to the unity of Christ.

CHAPTER XII.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE NESTORIAN AND EUTYCHIAN CONTROVERSY—RESULTS.

SCARCELY half a century was passed since Arianism had been compelled to own the power of the church as the minister of sound doctrine, when the restless spirit of error appeared in a new form, and even among men whose learning and piety might have been regarded as a sufficient defence against the slightest approaches of heretical speculation. The divinity of our Lord, in its truest and loftiest sense, was distinctly confessed throughout the universal church. But the question now arose, in what respect the titles proper to his Godhead might be used when He was contemplated in his human birth and sufferings ; or whether the expressions which seemed strictly applicable to the peculiarities of the divine or human nature might be employed indiscriminately in the language of devotion, or the formularies of doctrine.

The heresy of Apollinaris, in the preceding century, had led the way to disputes on this subject. Apollinaris asserted, that in Christ the Godhead occupied the place of the human soul ; whence it followed, that his humanity, as such, was imperfect, and the whole series of doctrines depending upon his “being made in all things like unto us, sin only except,” was placed in peril. Some

of the followers of Origen, pursuing the most doubtful speculations of their great master, involved the church in a long and passionate controversy. Theophilus of Alexandria, was the declared enemy of Origen's principles. The monks of Egypt, a numerous and influential body, were as devoted in their zeal to support and propagate them. Obligated at length to flee from the persecutions excited against them by Theophilus, they sought the aid of Chrysostom at Constantinople. Hence that admirable man was involved in the strife, and we have seen what were the consequences ; the hostility of the Alexandrian prelate becoming irresistible, when allied with that of Chrysostom's personal enemies in the imperial court.

In the course of the disputes thus carried on, men's minds were rendered unnaturally susceptible to the niceties of theological expression. The heart could no longer be trusted to speak its feelings. Some word might fall from the lips not found in the authorized vocabulary, or not so interpreted. Hence it was, that the bishops and doctors of Syria rendered themselves remarkable by the excessive care which they took to speak with precision in every allusion to the two-fold nature of Christ. Nestorius, a presbyter of Antioch, was made patriarch of Constantinople in 428 ; and Theophilus had been succeeded at Alexandria by his nephew Cyril, a man no less haughty in his temper and tyrannical in his acts. Like his predecessor, he fostered a spirit of the most violent hostility against the see of Constantinople and its possessor. The character of theology, as above described, afforded such men a ready means of attacking their enemies. It was almost impossible that expressions should not be sometimes employed, which the sharpened intellect of a controversialist might not so probe as to discover something

tending to error. But it so happened that Anastasius, a presbyter, and very much esteemed by Nestorius, argued one day, in preaching, with great severity against the practice of speaking of the Virgin Mary as the *mother of God*.^{*} If any such form of speech, he observed, was necessary, she should be described by the title of *mother of Christ*. Nestorius supported the views of Anastasius ; but the people had been so long accustomed to the objectionable phrase, that they rose in open violence against the patriarch. Cyril rejoiced at this occurrence. The controversy became more and more general. Each party, inflamed against the other, carried their opinions and expressions to the very limits of the opposing systems. Injustice was exercised on both sides. Nestorius had only objected to the title, *mother of God*, because the eternal divinity could assuredly have no earthly parent. But he was accused of denying the divinity of Christ. As he continued, however, to argue on the subject, he was led into the use of language which obscured the doctrine of what is theologically described as the *hypo-static union*, that is, the peculiar union in Christ of the divine and human natures so as to form but one person. He was, moreover, accused of obstinacy when, by persevering in his censure of the title applied to the Virgin Mary, he was exciting so much confusion in the church. Many of his friends even considered that he carried his objections beyond their due limit. They reminded him, that his enemies might persuade the people, excited as they were, that he denied the divinity of the Saviour ; and that though he was pure from the guilt of such a heresy, the most injurious consequences might arise both to himself and the church.

Many are the difficulties attending the history of this

controversy, and that which followed. "If we inquire," it has been said, "into the opinions of Nestorius, as expressed in his writings, we shall find that he rejected the errors of Ebion, Paulus Samosetanus, and Photinus, strongly condemning the opinion of those who affirm that Jesus Christ was a mere man. He maintains in express terms that the Word was united to the human nature in Jesus Christ, and that this union was most strict and intimate : that the two natures being united make but one Christ ; one Son only ; one person only, consisting of two natures : that the properties of the human and divine natures may be attributed to this person : and that it may be said, that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin ; that he suffered and died."

Thus far it would have been difficult for any one to convict Nestorius of error ; but, it is added, "He always denied that it might be said, that God was born, suffered, or died. And herein consisted his error ; for by reason of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures, the properties of the two natures of which it is compounded may not only be affirmed of the person, but it may also be said, that *God* is born, hath suffered, and is dead ; and that the *man* ought to be adored, is become immortal, impassible, &c. : although it cannot be said that the *divinity* is born, is dead, or hath suffered ; or that the *manhood* may be worshipped, or is immortal, or impassible."

This is not a mere ingenious distinction, but a very important elucidation of the truth. Abstractedly, it would be most erroneous to speak of God as capable of suffering ; but of Christ, personally, it is said, such is not the case. When in reference to him it is affirmed, that God suffered, it is said, not in respect to Deity itself, but to

the person of Christ ; to the one sole being, of whom alone, as truly God, such things could be said.

Nestorius was by nature bold and ardent. On his first arrival in Constantinople, he declared in his sermon before the emperor, that he would commence a war of extermination against the heretics. "Sire," he said, "free the earth from heretics, and I will give you heaven ; assist me in my war against them, and I will assist you, in yours against the Persians." His subsequent violence agreed with these declarations. He was dreaded and hated by all but his own party. The piety of his life, the general purity and strictness of his manners, could not save him from the usual consequences of unpopularity so provoked. When the more powerful of his enemies formed a league against him, there were few to sympathize with his misfortunes. Unlike Chrysostom, he had to expect the abuse, rather than the blessings of the people.

To secure his ruin, Cyril and his party employed their utmost efforts to convince the Roman pontiff, Cœlestinus, that the favourite dogma of Nestorius was not only heretical in itself, but connected with opinions fundamentally opposed to the doctrines of the church. Cœlestinus too readily listened to these representations. Synods were held under his auspices, and Nestorius was condemned. It was not sufficient, however, to obtain a sentence against him in these assemblies. Cyril pronounced anathemas upon him and his doctrine. These anathemas were strictly examined, and Cyril was considered by many excellent men, especially by Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus, and Andrew, bishop of Samosata, as guilty of error in adopting such extreme views in opposing Nestorius. John, bishop of Antioch, also favoured Nestorius at this

time, and admitted the explanation which he gave of his views.

At length the emperor Theodosius II. was induced to summon a general council at Ephesus. Strange to say, Cyril had the boldness and injustice to commence the business of the council before the members had arrived whose presence might secure the fairness of the proceedings. His grand object was to effect the deposition of Nestorius. With this end in view, he at once pronounced the sentence which condemned him as a heretic. But his triumph was of short duration. On the arrival of the western bishops, John of Antioch was made president of the assembly. The business was recommenced ; and now Cyril himself, with his ally, Memnon, bishop of Ephesus, were sentenced to deposition. The emperor, at first, approved of this proceeding ; but Cyril had too much influence, and was too skilful a politician to be so easily overcome. By his good management, the sentence was annulled ; and Nestorius only suffered the loss of his dignity.

The deposed patriarch was allowed quietly to retire to the monastery at Antioch, in which he had spent many of his happiest days. He remained there about four years ; but at the end of that period, was conveyed to the remoter district of Oasis. Thence, some short time after, he was banished to the Thebais ; and was driven to and fro till, when almost worn out with fatigue, the injuries which he suffered from a fall put an end to his distresses. But his doctrine did not die with him. He had followers whose zeal and ability enabled them to plant his opinion over a wide and distant region. Among these Nestorian missionaries, the most celebrated was Barsumas. By the labours of this devoted man, who was made bishop of

Nisibis in the year 435, a Nestorian church was established in Persia ; and from this country the emissaries of the sect extended their labours to the remote provinces of Assyria, Tartary, India, and China. As they appear to have retained the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and to have had no intention of bringing into question any of the principles necessary to evangelical teaching, the Nestorian Christians have been regarded by many writers as deserving the praise of faithful missionaries. Their founder never ceased to acknowledge the divinity of our Lord according to the Nicene Creed ; and the mere niceties of language and speculation were not likely to form a barrier to the spiritual faith and earnestness of men resolved on planting the gospel in distant regions.

But while the more ardent and laborious of the Nestorians were traversing remote provinces, the controversy against those who remained at home was renewed by a man well fitted both by nature and habits for a polemic. This was the monk Eutyches, the head of a monastic establishment in Constantinople, and whose age and learning rendered whatever he said deserving at least of respectful attention. Strongly attached to the Egyptian schools of theology, he viewed the doctrines of Nestorius as akin to the most dangerous heresy. The more he meditated on the subject, the more he became excited ; till at length he openly affirmed, that there is but one nature in Christ ; approaching thereby, as it seemed to most unprejudiced minds, the long-condemned and repudiated heresy of Apollinaris. Flavianus, the then patriarch of Constantinople, assembled what was called *a home synod*; and the opinions of Eutyches having been carefully considered, they were pronounced heretical. Leo,

the Roman pontiff, confirmed by his carefully declared sentiment on the subject, the decisions of the synod. But Eutyches boldly appealed to a general council; and one was accordingly assembled at Ephesus, in the year 449. By some strange violation of justice, the ecclesiastical proceedings of these times were very commonly under the immediate direction of those who had some great personal, or at least party, interest to subserve by their decisions. Thus, in the present case, the patriarch of Alexandria, Dioscorus, was appointed to preside at the council. He is described as a man of violent temper; and his enmity to Flavian was no less fierce than that which had characterized the conduct of Theophilus towards Chrysostom.

The result of deliberations carried on in an assembly so ordered may be easily imagined. After inquiries, which it had been predetermined should issue in one way, the doctrine of Eutyches was proclaimed orthodox. This would have been sufficient, it might have seemed, to satisfy the enemies of Flavian, and his church. But there was too much of personal feeling in most of these proceedings to render the actors in them content with decisions on matters of doctrine. The ruin of a rival was the object mainly desired; and unless some bishop or patriarch was deprived of his dignity, the members of a synod appear to have thought they but little supported the importance of their character.

Few, however, were the cases in which ecclesiastical jealousy led to such disgraceful excesses as those practised in this council of Ephesus. Frightful to say, Flavian, the head of one of the most important divisions of the Christian church, was actually sentenced by an assembly of his brethren, his brethren both by faith and profession, to be

publicly scourged. This infamous sentence was executed with unmitigated cruelty. It was followed by another dooming him to banishment ; and the unfortunate prelate died, not long after, in distant exile.

If the doctrines of Eutyches were to be judged according to the character of this bandit, or robber synod, as it was called by the Greeks, we should view them as a compound of errors both moral and spiritual. But Eutyches himself is not to be charged with the guilt of those who made the controversy originating in his opinion a veil for their ambitious and wicked policy. Eutyches beheld with terror the consequences which he supposed might follow the growth of Nestorianism. He could not understand how it was possible for its author to desire a distinction in the expressions used with respect to Christ's human and divine nature, without asserting the existence of two persons in the Saviour. In his anxiety to repel this dreaded error, he fell into that of expressing himself with most dangerous obscurity respecting the nature of Christ. Hence, the minds of faithful and humble believers were distressed by seeing that learning had darkened the truth as to our Lord's twofold nature ; that they were in danger of being deprived of the consolation which they had ever derived from the view of his human capability of suffering, with an infinite value belonging to that suffering, because of his divinity ; that they were now to hear of two persons in the one Saviour, and thence to be imbued with the strange notion that God and man in Christ were, in reality, distinct persons, as much as the Holy Spirit and the soul which He sanctifies and illuminates are distinct beings.

On the other hand, these same humble disciples of the Lord, when listening to the Eutychians, had to fear that

their faith was about to lose the support which it derived from the knowledge of a twofold nature in Christ. Two persons distinct from each other would have been two Christs ; but had there been only one nature, either the suffering which redeemed must have been illusory, or the suffering being real, its value must have been limited and unavailing.

The triumph gained at Ephesus was of short duration. By the efforts of Leo the Great, the Roman pontiff, a general council was convened at Chalcedon, in the year 451. In this assembly, a formal sentence of deposition was pronounced against Dioscorus, and others who had taken part in the late proceedings. The main reasons assigned for this decision, in regard to Dioscorus, were, "that he had attempted many things contrary to the order and discipline of the church ; for that he had absolved the priest Eutyches by his own authority, when that monk was lying under the condemnation of his own bishop ; that the holy see had pardoned the other bishops, who had been forced to do the same, but had since submitted themselves to the council, whereas Dioscorus obstinately persisted in his fault ; that he had committed no small crime in refusing to let Saint Leo's letter be read in the council of Ephesus ;" "that, notwithstanding this, the council had been ready to exercise the same lenity towards him as towards the other bishops ; but as he continued in his obstinacy, dared to excommunicate Saint Leo, refused, though summoned three times, to appear before the council, accused as he was of great crimes, and had received persons deposed and excommunicated into his communion ;"—"on these grounds of accusation the legate proceeded to declare the decision of the council in the following form: "For these causes, Leo, archbishop of

old Rome, doth by us, and by the synod, with the authority of Saint Peter, who is the rock and foundation of the church, and the ground of faith, depose Dioscorus from his episcopal dignity, and declare him unworthy of the priesthood."

But the most important business of the council was to draw up a formulary exhibiting the doctrine of the church, as then generally received, and free from the perplexities and variations in which the verbal refinements of controversialists seemed about to involve it. A letter written by Saint Leo to Flavian had now for some timeⁿ been regarded as containing a clear and authoritative statement of the true doctrine of the incarnation. In this celebrated epistle, the venerable bishop distinguishes two births of the Son of God, and two natures in Jesus Christ, the properties of which subsist distinctly, although united in one and the same person. He maintains that the Word assumed our nature and all the properties of it, sin only except; that it took true flesh like ours: and he rejects the confession of Eutyches, because it is absurd to say, that the Son in the incarnation is of two natures; and impious to maintain that, after the incarnation, he has but one. With this to aid them, and referring at the same time to the synodical letters addressed by Cyril to Nestorius, and the creed, as already received, the members of the council solemnly declared that, "following these writings of the holy fathers, they did believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, perfect God and perfect man, consubstantiated with God as to his divinity, and with man according to his humanity; in whom there are two natures united without change, division, or separation; so that the properties of the two natures do subsist in, and agree to one

and the same person, who is not divided into two, but is one Jesus Christ, as said in the Nicene Creed."

This confession was received throughout the church ; and thus up to the middle of the fifth century we see the doctrine of the apostolic times as still the foundation of the Christian's hope. Change and corruption might be discovered in the affairs of the church, as visible and blended with the world ; but no sooner were the more eminent of its members gathered together, as faithfully representing the whole body of God's people, than the flame of Divine truth rose like a pillar among them, and testified to the continued fulfilment of the promise, "Lo, I am with you always ; even unto the end of the world."

But the decision thus arrived at by the council of Chalcedon, was far from restoring peace to the church. In Egypt, and other provinces, the twofold nature in Christ was still denied. The opposite parties soon proceeded to acts of open violence ; and while the one assumed the title of Monophysites,* the other was described by that of Duophysites.† In Antioch fresh elements were added to the strife by the furious zeal of Peter the Fuller, made bishop of Antioch, after previous attempts to usurp the dignity, by the Emperor Zeno, in 482. As if for the mere purpose of disturbing men's minds, even in the most solemn exercises of devotion, he made an addition to the ancient hymn known by the title of the "Cherubical Hymn, or Trisagion." The words of this short but sublime song had been familiar to many generations of believers : "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory, who art blessed for ever, Amen." This was its most ancient and its

* Believers in a single nature.

† A double nature.

simplest form ; and Chrysostom delighted to believe that it was thus that the seraphim sang it, as spoken of in Isaiah. But before the middle of the fifth century, some addition was made to it, as, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us!" These words were added, it is said, with the view of rendering the hymn a more perfect confession of the Trinity ; the title of *Holy God* being applied to the Father, *Holy Mighty* to the Son, and *Holy Immortal* to the Holy Ghost. The next addition, but with less pure intentions, was made by Peter the Fuller, who, in order to aid his particular views, subjoined the words, "Who was crucified for us." The name applied to the party of which this bishop of Antioch was the head, was *Theopaschites*, a word signifying the *Suffering God*. But it was evident that the hymn being an address to the Trinity, and not to the Son alone, the words which he had added might lead the unlearned to suppose, that all the persons of the Godhead had suffered upon the cross.

The confusion which now prevailed was universal. Both men of the world and pious Christians beheld with alarm the progress of disputes which generated the most turbulent passions. To put, if possible, a period to the struggle, the Emperor Zeno issued a decree of union, known in church history by the name of *Henoticon*. Most of the leading men of the contending parties were prevailed upon to sign this decree. Peace was, therefore, in some measure restored. Considerable numbers, however, on both sides, complained bitterly against their chiefs for having consented to a compromise. Hence they formed themselves into new sects ; and among these, one assumed the title of the *Acephali* ; or, *those without a head*, because left without a leader. Untold evils

resulted from the prolonged existence of these turbulent sects. They retained the bad dispositions of those who had first led them on as the instruments of their selfish policy ; and as they mingled among the people, and insinuated their errors or their doubts into the uninstructed minds of simple believers, the church itself seemed to be daily losing somewhat of that beauty and glory which it possessed, when its people could join in one confession of faith, and in one song of praise.

CHAPTER XIII.

STATE OF RELIGION IN THE WESTERN DIVISION OF THE EMPIRE—AMBROSE—HIS ORIGINAL RANK AND EMPLOYMENTS—HIS LABOURS—INSTANCES OF HIS ZEAL AND COURAGE—HIS DEATH.

THE controversies of which we have spoken above, were mainly confined to the East. But under no circumstances could they have been regarded with indifference by any portion of the church. Much less likely was this to be the case in the present state of the Roman see. That important province of Christendom had been governed by a succession of bishops, all more or less distinguished for eminent abilities and devotion to their calling. By their surpassing skill and energy the church in the West had hitherto been preserved from any dangerous convulsions. They had pursued a course which set heresy and schism at defiance ; and the firm, steady determination ever manifested to uphold the doctrine of the first three councils ; the rejection of all speculative views which could interfere with this doctrine ; the plain, earnest statements set forth from time to time on this subject, tended to consolidate the interests of the whole western division of the Christian world, and to secure its superiority to that of the East.

But it was not the wisdom of the Roman court alone to which this must be attributed. Great and wonderful men were raised up in the West. Intense piety, charac-

terized by all the graces of a simple faith ; profound genius ; untiring patience in the developement of divine convictions and experience,—all these things met in the remarkable and saintly men of whom we are now to speak. •

Ambrose was the descendant of a noble Roman family, and the son of the prætorian præfect in Gaul. It is said that while an infant, and sleeping in his cradle, a swarm of bees settled harmlessly on his face and about his lips. His father, who beheld the phenomenon, foretold, with delight, his child's future eminence. The education which he received was in accordance with the rank of his family, and the promise given by his genius. On his arriving at manhood, he devoted himself to public business ; and was, in due time, promoted to the government of some of the provinces in Cisalpine Gaul. The seat of his government was Milan ; and he had passed five years in the exercise of his important functions, when Auxentius, the bishop of the diocese, was taken ill, and died. This prelate had created many disturbances in the province ; and the people and clergy earnestly longed to see his place supplied by some good and holy man. Full of anxiety, they appealed to the emperor on the subject. He desired them to exercise their own wisdom and choice. This opened the way to faction and tumult. Ambrose lamented the state of confusion into which the city was thrown, and proceeding to the church, addressed the assembled multitude in a speech well calculated to subdue the violence which prevailed. In the midst of the murmurs of assent which followed this powerful address, an infantine voice was heard exclaiming, *Ambrose is bishop*.

Whatever might prompt this strange announcement,

it was listened to by the crowd with breathless attention. No sooner was the surprise over, than the people, yielding to the impression that the child spoke by inspiration, proclaimed aloud that Ambrose should indeed be their bishop. It was far from the desire of Ambrose to undertake an office which involved, to his pious apprehension, so many fearful responsibilities. Various were the artifices which he employed to escape the entreaties of the community, and the commands of the emperor. But his efforts to conceal himself were vain. Obligated to yield, he still requested time to prepare for baptism ; for, strange to say, he as yet occupied only the station of a catechumen. Eight days after his baptism he was consecrated bishop of Milan. The emperor himself was present at the solemnity, and at the conclusion of the service exclaimed, with devout fervour, "I thank thee, O Lord Almighty, and Saviour, that thou hast made choice of this person, to whom I had committed the power over men's bodies, to be intrusted with the souls of men, and hast thereby declared my choice to be fit and just."

The sudden elevation of Ambrose to the episcopal dignity could only be justified, according to the existing laws of the church, on the supposition that the call was divine. It may be questioned, whether the assent of many of the stricter prelates would have been so easily obtained, had Ambrose occupied a less elevated rank in society. The case of Nectarius, suddenly elevated to the patriarchate of Constantinople, was of the same kind ; but Nectarius was also a man of high rank. So also in that of Eusebius of Cæsarea, the transition was only from one dignity to another ; and both churchmen and laymen seem to have thought that it would not be wise to urge too strictly obedience to the canons where

a dispensation might be attended with many useful results.

In Basil's answer to the epistle which Ambrose sent him immediately after his consecration, we find him rejoicing "that God had made choice of so eminent a person ; of one selected out of the imperial city, and entrusted with the government of provinces ; a person distinguished for his wisdom, by the nobility of his house, by the exemplary virtue and integrity of his life, the vigour of his eloquence, and his wise conduct of secular affairs." In conclusion, he says, "Go on, therefore, O thou man of God ; and as thou hast not received or learnt the gospel of Christ from man, but hast been taken by our Lord himself from among the secular judges, and translated to the apostolic chair, fight the good fight of faith ; correct and reform the distempers of the people, if any be infected with the Arian contagion ; revive the ancient tracts and footsteps of the fathers ; and by frequent intercourse of letters build up that foundation of love and kindness which thou hast now laid between us, so that, however distant we may be in our habitations, our minds and spirits may be near at hand to converse together."

Nothing could better prove the earnestness of Ambrose and his noble devotion to the duties of his new state, than the following circumstances : the first, that he immediately resigned his large estates, providing liberally for the poor, into the hands of his brother and sister, directing that after the decease of these near relations, the whole should be devoted to purposes of religion and charity. By this measure he freed himself from the anxieties, temptations, and suspicions which might have attended his possession of such large estates as a Christian bishop.

The other circumstance alluded to was of no less importance to his future usefulness. Hitherto he had devoted his mind to the acquisition of that varied secular learning which was suited to his high position in the world. The vast and intricate speculations of theology were little familiar to his mind. But he knew the danger of remaining ignorant, as a bishop, of anything which regarded the state or progress of ecclesiastical learning. Not ashamed of becoming a student, he sent for Simplician, a presbyter in the Roman church, a man of great piety and profound erudition. With the aid of this excellent instructor, Ambrose pursued his studies so successfully that he became versed in all the religious knowledge of his times. Simplician was advanced in life; but he not only continued to solace Ambrose by his friendship and counsels, throughout his lengthened labours, but succeeded him in the bishopric.

The Arian party had still a powerful remnant in the West. On the death of Gratian, the portion of the empire over which he ruled came into the hands of the younger Valentinian, then about thirteen years of age. The mother of the prince, the Empress Justina, was a zealous Arian, and did not fail to imbue her son with the principles of her party. Ambrose warned Valentinian of his danger, explained the doctrine of the fathers, and entreated him to avoid the sin of injuring the great cause of Divine truth. Indignant at the paternal address of the bishop, the youthful sovereign gave way to his rage, and surrounding the church, in which Ambrose had preached, with his guards, commanded the prelate to depart. "That," calmly replied Ambrose, "I cannot willingly do. I will not betray the sheep-fold to the wolves, nor deliver up the church which is holy to im-

pious intruders. If you wish to dispatch me, you have swords and spears : I do not shrink from death in such a cause."

Ambrose was obliged to employ all the force of his character, and the best energies of Christian fortitude, to stem the increasing torrent of Arianism and other heresies. Nor was it against divisions in the church only that he had to contend. In the political distractions of the empire the cause of religion had suffered grievously. The fearful disputes which were daily taking place among the clergy, tended still further to retard its progress ; and the few men of learning and station who still adhered to the exploded system of heathenism, gladly availed themselves of these appearances of weakness to attack Christianity itself. Symmachus, the present præfect of Rome, was himself a heathen. To him his party naturally looked for protection ; and he was induced, at their persuasion, to present a petition to the emperor to restore the rites and emblems of the old religion. His address affords an excellent specimen of the eloquence and reasoning of his age.

After speaking of the praise due to those who defend the constitution, the laws, and sanctions of their ancestors, he says, " To this end we humbly request that that religion may be restored to us, which was for so many ages beneficial to the republic. Who is there so much a friend to the barbarians as not to complain of the loss of the Altar of Victory ? We are cautious with respect to posterity, and are willing to avoid whatever wears the portraiture of ill-luck. Let us, therefore, even if we despise the deity, yet pay respect to the name ; for you are already much, and in future will be still more, indebted to Victory. Let those think lightly of this deity

who have never experienced her favours ; but be it far from you to desert a power which has been so instrumental to the magnifying of your triumphs. The altar of Victory being taken away, where shall we swear to observe your laws and statutes ? What notion of religion shall affright the profligate from perjury ? True it is, that God is everywhere, and the perfidious wretch can nowhere be safe ; but the awe of a deity present with us in such a place is a mighty means of deterring men from vice. That one altar preserves the whole people in unity ; that one altar keeps every private person from breach of trust ; nor does anything give greater authority and reverence to our decrees than that they are made by senators sworn at these altars. Shall the habitation of the gods be profaned by perjury ? And shall such a course be pursued by our most venerable princes, who are themselves secured in their persons and government by the oaths of their subjects ?”

Alluding, then, to those proceedings of the Emperor Constantius which were adverse to heathenism, the skillful orator adds, “ Let your majesties take pattern from the other actions of that prince, which are fitter to be copied : He took away none of the privileges of the vestal virgins. He conferred the revenues of the priesthood on the nobility ; and allowed the expenses of the sacrifices and other religious observances, out of the exchequer. Being attended with pomp by the senate through all the streets of this immortal city, he cast his eyes with pleasure on the temples, read the names of the gods to whom they were dedicated, made inquiry into the origin of the buildings, and admired the piety of the founders. And though he himself was of another faith, yet he was never anxious to abolish and extirpate this,

the religion of the empire. Every man has his peculiar rites and modes of worship. The supreme divinity which governs the world has assigned several tutelar guardians to every city ; for as every man at his birth has a distinct soul, so has every nation a particular genius allotted to it. To these considerations, we may add the advantage of those rites so especially recommending our deities to mankind ; for while reason is so greatly in the dark as to the divinity, whence can we better derive our knowledge of the gods than from the remembrance and instances of our former prosperity ? Now if antiquity be sufficient to render religion venerable to us, we ought to preserve that faith which has continued so many ages, and to follow our parents, who happily walked in the steps of their progenitors.”

This appeal in favour of the ancient altars is followed by another in defence of the vestal virgins ; and it is intimated, that the famine which had been lately suffered might be ascribed to the sin incurred in depriving them of their revenues.

Ambrose answered the address of Symmachus by a counter address to the emperor. The whole of this composition is replete with noble thoughts and sentiments, and proves how richly Ambrose merited the honour paid him by Augustine and other men of similar character. Symmachus had introduced, with oratorical art, Rome personified, and uttering her laments at the downfall of her ancient altars. Ambrose also introduces her, but speaking thus to those who wished to restore the heathen rites : “ To what purpose do you weary me with your multiplied sacrifices, and crimson me with the blood of the innocent herd ? The trophies and signs of victory are not legible in the fibres of a beast, but in the courage of the troops. I

used other methods of discipline when I put on laurels for the conquest of the world. It was the valour of Camillus which defeated the triumphant army already in possession of your walls and the fortifications of the capitol. He 'it was who recovered those standards which the gods themselves could not defend ; and those whom religion was too weak to affright, his bravery destroyed. Why should I speak of the achievements of Attilius Regulus, who conquered for the Romans by dying for them ? Scipio Africanus won his glory not by lying prostrate before the altars in the capitol, but by charging the troops of Hannibal, and reaping triumph with his sword. Tell me not that these were the observances of the ancients. I hate those ceremonies which were used by the Neros. And why should I mention those emperors whose reign was of no longer duration than a month or two ? And whose funerals immediately succeeded their assumption of the royal purple ? Or is that a new thing, that the barbarians have deserted their own habitations to invade the Roman territories ? Were those emperors Christian, when, by an unparalleled but miserable example, the father wore chains in Persia while the son was trampling on the liberties of the senate and people, both giving mankind a proof that the promises of victory which the augurs made them were vain and fallacious ? Was there not at that time an altar of Victory ? I am ashamed of my ancient errors ; and, notwithstanding my grey hairs, these reflections cover me with blushes. It does not disturb me that I am charged with becoming like the rest of the world, a convert in my old age. Never can it be too late to become wise and good. Let those blush who, advanced in years, are past the hopes of amendment. It is not age but piety which makes us venerable. In

this only was my condition like that of the barbarians—I had no knowledge of the true God.”

Symmachus had pleaded for the protection of the emperors as necessary to the maintenance of the old heathen religion. The observation of Ambrose on this point affords an admirable instance of his argumentative acuteness. “The ancient altars, according to Symmachus, ought to be restored to the images, the ornaments to the temples. Let them tender a petition to such purpose to a heathen prince : a Christian emperor knows no honour due to any but the altar of Christ Jesus. Why would they compel the hands and mouths of holy men to minister to the promotion of their sacrilegious designs ? Let the tongue of our prince be employed in resounding the praises of his Saviour, in celebrating him only whose goodness he experiences ; for ‘the heart of the king is in the hand of God.’ Did ever any of the heathen emperors erect an altar to Christ ? While, therefore, they petition for the restoration of what was formerly theirs, they give the Christian emperors encouragement by their example to consider what deference they ought to pay to the religion which they profess, seeing that the gentiles subject everything to their superstition. As we have begun so let us go on. We glory in our sufferings ; they are troubled at their losses. What they account an injury we reckon among our trophies. Never did they bestow greater honours or favours upon us than when they passed their edicts that all the servants of Christ should be scourged, banished, and martyred. What their infidelity thought a punishment, religion turned into a blessing. Behold those men of invincible courage, and you will find that our belief has been increased and propagated by injuries, by poverty,

by death itself ; while the heathen, on the contrary, are persuaded that, unless their religion be maintained at the public expense, or by the hand of power, it can no longer exist.”

In answer to the complaint that the supporters of the ancient religion had been deprived of their revenues, Ambrose says, “Do they complain of their hard usage, and demand justice ? Where was this justice, then, when the poor Christians, after they had been stripped of their estates, were denied the very privilege of life, and with unknown barbarity were denied even the benefit of sepulture, the common birthright of every human being ? And this is a new triumph of our faith. The heathens themselves now condemn the wicked actions of their ancestors. With what reason, then, shame be it to them ! can they beg the continuance of offices the proceedings of which they so openly condemn ? But, after all, no man ever yet denied the temples their offerings, or the priests their legacies. Their lands only are taken from them, because what they held by the title of religion they employed only to irreligious purposes. They plead our example for enjoying such estates : why do they not also dispose of them to such good ends as we do ? The church has no patrimony but her faith ; that is her rent, that is her income ; the lands of the church are the possession of the poor. Let them tell me what captives were ever redeemed, what exiles provided for by the incomes of the temples ? The estate is taken from them, but it is put to the right use. This is the crime of which we are accused ; this is the sacrilege which is said to have provoked the anger of heaven, and the guilt of which nothing less than a public famine could expiate.”

To the popular argument, that all the miseries here

alluded to originated with the neglect of the heathen altars, Ambrose replies by the question, "What man is so unacquainted with the accidents of human life, as to be astonished at the difference of seasons in point of fertility?" And he then shows that, in many of the provinces, the abundance of the harvest was sufficiently great to compensate for its failure in other parts.

The reasoning founded on the respect due to antiquity is thus refuted: "Symmachus affirms, that we ought to maintain those rites which our forefathers established. And why so? Is it because all things grow to perfection as they grow in years? Was not the world at first one confused and undigested chaos, in which all things lay huddled together without form and order? and did not the whole acquire beauty when the hand of God made a separation between heaven, earth, and sea, and confined each within its proper bounds? and when the earth, newly risen from its moist bed of darkness, wondered to see a bright sun darting its benign and illuminating beams upon it? Even in the ordinary course of nature the day is ushered in with an ambiguous light, and the sun acquires strength by degrees to enlighten and warm the world. The moon itself, the proper emblem of the church in the sacred oracles, increases gradually to its fulness; for, renewing her light once in every month, at first the shadows of the night are too strong for it, and eclipse its splendour; but when a few days have filled her sharp, pointed horns, and she lives at a distance from the sun, she gives the night the assistance of her beams, and supplies the absence of the day. The old world was ignorant of tillage; but when once men began to understand the art of husbandry, and saw the face of the earth covered with corn, and the rude soil clothed with vineyards, how

easily were they led to exchange their old brutish manners for civilized and social life ! The very spring itself, which inclines mankind to a correspondence with nature, is clothed with leaves which in time give place to later fruits. ' And is it not also thus with man, who in infancy has the thoughts and pursues the delights of children, but when grown to maturity is ashamed of such impertinencies ? If all things, therefore, must continue as they were at the beginning, then have we reason to be angry that the world broke from its dark prison to which it had been confined, and sought the region of light and visibility. And is it not a nobler triumph to set the understanding free from the night of ignorance, than to rescue the earth from shadows and obscurity ? And do not the beams of truth shine more benignly upon the mind than the rays of the sun upon the eyes ? All things, therefore, in nature have suffered their alterations, that your grey-headed religion might also follow the example. For those who will yet be influenced by such an argument, let them be angry with autumn because, being one of the latest seasons, it matures our fruits ; let them quarrel with the vintage because it happens in the declining part of the year ; and let them slight the olive because it is the latest ripe. Now our harvest is the conversion of souls, that they may be brought into the church ; our vintage is the service of God, so as to inherit his favours ; which service from the beginning of the world was eminent in a few saints, but in these last ages is made known to the whole world, that all men might take notice that the Christian faith was penetrating even the most cultivated minds. For that man cannot expect the crown of victory who has no adversaries ; whereas the sacred verities became justly famous by baffling the

opinions which opposed their reception." In reference to the petition that the altar of Victory might be re-erected, he complains that such a proceeding would be most unjust to the Christians who assembled in the place where it was proposed to re-establish the sacrifices. "What," he says, "would this be but to trample upon our rights? And can it be suffered that a heathen should offer his sacrifices when a Christian is present? Ought they not to be satisfied that our public baths, our porticos, and streets are filled with the images of their gods? And shall not the condition of every member of the common assembly be equal? Shall those senators who have embraced Christianity have their consciences wounded by the oaths of those who swear at that altar? If they oppose such proceedings they will appear to betray a lie, and if they acquiesce they will countenance the sacrilege. 'Where,' says Symmachus, 'shall we swear to observe your laws and sanctions?' Must your determinations, therefore, which are included in the laws, receive their confirmation from the ceremonies of the gentiles, and oblige to fidelity not only those who are present but those who are absent? And, what is more, O most sacred emperors, your own honour is affronted; for you compel, if you command, such things. The august Emperor Constantius, of venerable memory, being not yet made a Christian by baptism, thought himself polluted should he but see that altar. He commanded it to be removed, not to be restored. That action of his carried its authority and vindication with it. The senate meets on the summons of your writ, and it is to you they swear fealty, not to imaginary deities. Your interests they prefer to their own and to their children's, but not to those of their religion."

Ambrose enjoyed the satisfaction of finding his address received with the attention which it deserved. The efforts of Symmachus and his party were defeated. Heathenism was driven from every position in which it pretended to contest the field with Christianity and Reason. In a few years the arguments employed by Ambrose became familiar to the most ordinary minds; and those who wished to exhibit their ability in subtle disputation found, that they must forsake the gross and absurd dogmas of the heathen. for the principles of some of the Christian sects, which, even in their worst forms had still something more fitted to excite inquiry and respect.

The Arian party obtained a temporary triumph by the decisions of a council held at Ariminum. Aided still further by the Empress Justinia, they were now permitted to hold public assemblies, and one of the churches of Milan was demanded for their use. The day at length arrived on which the decree of the emperor was to be put in execution. A number of soldiers, under the command of certain tribunes, were sent to the church. Ambrose had already prepared the people for the approaching contest. The lessons and services of the day were well calculated to excite their devotion. One of the lessons contained the history of Ahab and Naboth; and Ambrose exclaimed in his fervid style of eloquence, "God forbid that I should part with Christ's inheritance. If Naboth would not yield that of his father's, shall I betray that of the Lord? I have given an answer as becomes a bishop, let the emperor do as becomes an emperor. Rather will I sacrifice my life than violate my faith."

While the bishops and the emissaries of the court were engaged in a stormy conference, the people continued to pour forth their ardent prayers to Heaven for the pre-

servation of the faith. Ambrose, on being urged, day after day, to assent to the demand made, at length replied : " Did the emperor require anything of mine, land or money, I would not oppose him ; but those things which immediately belong to God are not subject to the authority of the emperor. If it be my patrimony which you seek, take it ; if my person, I am here ready for you. Do you wish to hurry me to prison or to death ? Either will be a kindness to me. I will not, be assured, surround myself with crowds of people, nor will I fly to the altar to save my life, but will rather willingly offer it up for the altar's sake."

The greatest excitement prevailed throughout the city. Everything gave token of some approaching violence ; but the paternal influence of Ambrose prevailed over the passions, not only of the people but of the soldiers. The latter crowded the church, which was expected to be the scene of tumult. Terror filled the minds of the congregation as they saw them enter. But the feelings of these rude men had been subdued by the calm and sublime devotion of Ambrose. When they saw the agitation of the people, they exclaimed, " O fear not ; we are come to pray, not to fight." The day and night were passed in solemn exercises of religion. Ambrose preached and expounded, and the multitude hung upon his lips as impressed with a livelier assurance than they had ever before experienced of the goodness and providence of God.

It was in vain for the emperor or his mother to resist such a manifestation of public feeling. The most experienced of their advisers entreated them to take the readiest measures for quieting the excitement. Valentinian angrily answered some of those who spoke to him on the subject, " I believe if Ambrose should command it, you would

deliver me up to be a prisoner." Knowing the emperor's feelings, one of his courtiers sought Ambrose, and threatened him with death for the conduct he had pursued. Ambrose calmly replied, "God Almighty, if he please, may permit you to make good your threatenings; I will suffer as a bishop; do you what becomes a courtier. But God defend his church from such persecutors. Upon me let them expend their rage, and quench their thirst with my blood."

Tranquillity being restored for a time, Ambrose was entreated to consecrate a church which had been lately built. According to the custom and the spirit of the age, the consecration of a church was considered wanting in the essentials of the solemnity, unless the relics of some saint were placed beneath the altar. It is recorded by certain contemporary writers, that the remains of two martyrs, Protasius and Gervasius, were wonderfully discovered by St. Ambrose at this particular juncture. The same authors speak of miracles which were wrought at the tombs of the martyrs; and it has been suggested by pious men of later times, that God might allow these remarkable circumstances to take place in order to give the faithful servants of Christ, the ministers of his pure word and sacraments, power to withstand the enemies of the truth, whether involved in the darkness of heathenism, or in the labyrinths of speculation and heresy.

The danger to which the empire was exposed by the progress and successes of Maximus, compelled the enemies of Ambrose to refrain from further attempts at his destruction. His character was venerated not only in his own diocese, but in the most distant provinces; and when the descent of Maximus upon Italy was daily expected, he was entreated by the court to proceed as ambassador

to Triers, where Maximus had assembled the main body of his army. Ambrose consented to undertake the difficult and even dangerous duty. The discourse which took place between him and the tyrant affords a further illustration of his admirable skill and ability in conducting not only the affairs of the church, but those which concerned the general good of the state. But the jealousy of rivals, and the suspicions entertained by Valentinian, left affairs in the same condition as before. At length the victorious arms of Theodosius freed the empire from the ruin threatened by Maximus, and Ambrose had the happiness to see a prince at the head of the government whose virtues promised the most valuable aid to the cause of piety.

But if the venerable prelate exhibited the force of his character in his resistance to the known enemies of the church, his firmness and anxious zeal for its interests were even still more remarkably shown in his conduct towards those who, though numbered among the friends of religion, seemed deserving of blame. On one occasion, when Theodosius had issued an edict which appeared unjust in the eyes of Ambrose, he preached a sermon in the presence of the emperor which he could scarcely fail of applying to himself. On his descending the pulpit, Theodosius said to him, "Bishop, have you preached this against me?" "No," replied Ambrose, "I have not preached it against you, but for you."

About two years after this, a tumult occurred in the city of Thessalonica. Theodosius himself was inclined to pardon the offence; but his ministers urged upon him the necessity of punishing the inhabitants with exemplary severity. He unhappily yielded to their persuasions. Sentence was passed upon the unfortunate city, and vast numbers

of the inhabitants were immediately put to the sword. At the time when this occurred, Ambrose and several other bishops were holding a synod on the affairs of the church. The news of the massacre filled them with dismay and sorrow. They felt how inconsistent such barbarities were with the character of a Christian prince or a Christian court. Ambrose was desired to remonstrate with Theodosius on the subject ; and to represent to him, that as he had ever sought to enjoy communion with the Church of Christ, he was injuring the very cause of the gospel by a conduct so inconsistent with evangelical mercy and moderation.

Ambrose lost no time in writing to the emperor ; and he plainly intimated in his epistle that, unless the prince, exalted as he was, repented of his crime, and manifested those sentiments which were proper to one who had sinned against the gospel and humanity, nothing could ever induce him, as a bishop, to admit him to the holy communion. Theodosius, it is said, was deeply affected by the reproofs of Ambrose. He knew and venerated his virtues ; he felt that it was not in pride that he spoke, but with the anxious and loving solicitude of an aged father. He soon after returned to Milan, and proceeded to the church. Ambrose had been informed of his approach, and met him at the door of the edifice. "Sire," he said, "you do not, perhaps, rightly apprehend the frightful character of the massacre lately committed. The storm of your fury is blown over, but reason has not yet recovered its sight, to discern clearly the greatness of the evil. Your eyes are blinded by the lustre of your imperial rank ; your power imposes upon your understanding, and you cannot see your offence. But you would do well to consider the frail and corruptible condition of

human nature, and to reflect upon that original dust out of which we were all made, and unto which we must all return. Let not the splendour of your purple robes hinder you from acknowledging the infirmities of that body which they cover. Sire, you are of the same nature with the people whom you govern ; nor are they your subjects only ; in one sense they are your fellow-servants. There is one Lord and Ruler of the world, the great Creator of all things. And with what eyes will you behold the temple of this common Lord ? With what feet will you tread his sanctuary ? How will you stretch forth those hands in prayer while they are still reeking with the blood of the innocent ? How will you presume with such hands to receive the most sacred body of our Lord ? How will you lift up his precious blood to those lips which lately uttered so savage a decree for the unjust shedding so much blood ? Depart, therefore, and seek not by a second offence to aggravate your former fault ; but quietly take the yoke upon you, that yoke which our great Lord above has allotted you. This counsel is sharp, but it is medicinal, and conducive to your salvation." The emperor, though warned by the letter which he had received, manifested the profoundest astonishment. Having made some allusion to David, Ambrose replied, "Him whom you have imitated in sin follow also in his repentance." Theodosius had the piety and good sense to respect the holy zeal opposed to his rank and power. He retired from the church. For eight months he continued to wear mourning, and in his whole behaviour manifested the dispositions of a penitent. One day, shortly before Christmas, he was observed by Rufinus, one of his ministers, bathed in tears. Rufinus, little capable of entering into the sentiments of his master, but

affectionately attached to him, sought to remove his melancholy by cheerful conversation. "Rufinus," said the emperor, "you little know the trouble which I feel. Servants and beggars may freely go into the house of God and pour out their prayers to heaven; while against me the church doors, and, therefore, the gates of heaven, are miserably closed. For I remember what our Lord has declared,—‘Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven.’" Rufinus immediately replied, "If such be your feeling, I will hasten to the bishop, and beg him to release you from the sentence." "No," said the emperor, "you will never be able to persuade Ambrose to betray God's commands from reverence to the imperial dignity. I know that he has but done what is just."

Rufinus, persisting in expressing his belief that Ambrose might be softened, hastened to the church. But the bishop regarded him as one of the chief instigators of the massacre at Thessalonica. Instead, therefore, of granting his request, he reproved him severely for his cruelty; and on being informed that Theodosius himself was on his way to the church, he sternly intimated, that the attempt which he seemed about to make to intrude unlawfully into the sanctuary, was little in accordance with the sentiments proper to a penitent.

The language and bearing of Ambrose, if correctly described, appear so like those of the haughty ecclesiastics of a later age, that we are almost tempted to question his possession of those Christian graces of temper for which he is otherwise celebrated. But we must bear in mind, that the cause in which he was taking so decided and perilous a part, was the cause of mercy and justice; the cause of humanity against a capricious tyranny. He

understood too well the character of the political governments of his age to hope that they would ever, of themselves, make provision for the correction of abuses, or to expect at their hands a voluntary sacrifice to mercy. The rising power of the church was the only antagonist element to the fierce spirit of ancient rule. Ambrose saw this; and with the ability of a master-mind, and the devotion of a martyr, he availed himself of the vantage ground afforded him by his office to fight the battle of afflicted humanity.

How frightful was the massacre which had so strongly excited the Christian indignation of this great man, may be understood from the following incident. Among those whom the soldiers had seized and were hurrying away to execution, were the sons of a merchant, a venerable man, who loved his children better than his life. Overwhelmed with anguish, he rushed into the midst of the crowd, implored the soldiers to pause for a few minutes, and to let him die in the place of his sons. To strengthen his entreaties, he offered to give them all he possessed if they would grant his prayer. Moved, in some degree, by his passionate supplications, the soldiers paused, and then told him that their numbers must be made up; that they could not spare both his sons, but that he might take one of them. What was to be done? The wretched father felt now, if possible, a worse torture than before. He could utter nothing but ineffectual groans; and the savage nature of the soldiers allowing no longer delay, he saw both his beloved sons struck dead at his feet.

Numberless other cases of similar enormity occurred in this massacre; and though Ambrose may have spoken in a tone which the temper of later times would scarcely allow, justice, humanity, and freedom, no less than re-

ligion, will acknowledge, that, considering the circumstances in which he was placed, he struggled nobly for their interests.

Theodosius, on reaching the church, entered the chamber in which the bishop was sitting. The latter reproved him for his temerity ; on which the emperor replied : “ I do not affront the established constitutions, nor do I desire to enter the sanctuary contrary to the laws of the church. I only desire you to release me from the sentence of excommunication, and to imitate the compassion, and tenderness of our common Lord, and not to bar those gates against me which he has opened to all penitents.” “ And what signs of repentance,” said Ambrose, “ have you afforded, guilty as you have been, of so foul a crime ? With what medicines have you cured your wounds ?” “ It is for you,” Theodosius mildly answered, “ to prescribe the remedy ; my part is to submit, and comply with the prescriptions.”

Ambrose, seeing the disposition of the emperor, admirably improved his opportunity, and immediately replied : “ As you have given loose to rage, and allowed a warrant to be executed which neither reason nor justice, but passion dictated, let a law be passed which shall cancel all decrees issued in haste and fury ; let the execution of all warrants which concern the lives of the people or the forfeiture of estates be deferred for thirty days, that there may be time for mature and deliberate judgment. When this period is expired, let those who drew up the warrant again present it to you, that so reason, being freed from the fumes and clouds of anger, may impartially weigh the case, and discern whether it be right or wrong.”

Theodosius had the good sense to acknowledge the reasonableness of these demands. He consented to pur-

chase his readmission to church-communion by affording the best proofs of penitence ; and thus Ambrose obtained for society the most efficient securities against tyranny which the character of the times would allow. It is said that the emperor performed, with devout submission, every act which could indicate the most profound humiliation. On entering the church, he threw himself on the ground, exclaiming in the words of David, " My soul cleaveth unto the dust ; quicken thou me according unto thy word." Tears bedewed his cheeks ; and when he approached the altar, he continued aloud to bewail his sins and the evil consequences of his passion. Another trial of his sincerity awaited him. It was customary for the emperors in the East to enter within the rails of the altar, when about to partake of the Eucharist. Theodosius, ignorant of the different practice prevailing in the West, acted as he was used to do in the other parts of his dominions. Ambrose immediately sent the principal deacons to inform him that the places within the rails were for the clergy only ; that though the purple made men emperors, it did not make them priests.

So far was Theodosius from expressing any feeling of resentment at this rebuke, that he left the seat which he had taken, with an assurance that he would never be found so offending again ; and the circumstance is said to have made such a deep impression upon his mind, that on his return to Constantinople he always stood without the rails at the administration of the Lord's Supper, instead of entering within the altar, as he had formerly done. When the patriarch, Nectarius, asked why he did thus, he replied, " That he had at length learnt the difference between a prince and a bishop ; that he had with great difficulty found a teacher of the truth ; and that Ambrose

was the only person he had met with who really merited the name of a bishop."

The influence which Ambrose enjoyed had been gained by his pre-eminent virtues and piety. It was uniformly exercised in the cause of truth and charity. Many were the occasions which the unsettled times in which he lived afforded for the exhibition of his Christian heroism. The force of his character and example were felt not only in the church but in the state ; and there is good reason to believe that he effected no slight improvement in the opinions of the great men of his age, as to the principles which ought to govern them in their treatment of the people.

It was not till his end approached that he ceased from those labours to which he had so long devoted his talents and energies. He continued to the last to expound the word of God ; and was employed at his death on the forty-third Psalm. The benevolence of his heart as well as his principles had made him the friend of the poor and the suffering wherever found. He was mourned, therefore, by all classes of the community. Heathens and Jews mingled their tears with those of Christians when he was borne to the grave. No injurious treatment had ever provoked him to resentment. It was his constant rule to overcome evil with good. His humility and moderation were equal to his charity ; and while he exercised a princely hospitality on all fitting occasions in his own house, he would neither accept an invitation to a feast, nor violate any of the rules which he deemed proper to a course of self-denial and discipline.

His writings are characterized by a spirit of fervent piety. They exhibit neither the depth of thought, nor the profound learning, which we admire in the works of

some of the other fathers ; but they abound in beautiful sentiments, and prove how truly he valued and understood the word of God ; how he rejoiced in its revelations, and delighted to unfold its mysteries to those who were thirsting for the waters of salvation. It was his custom, first to give the literal sense of Scripture, and then to show how it would admit of a spiritual interpretation. Thus he wrote two books on the life of Abraham. In the former he described the various actions of the patriarch ; his virtues and holy resignation to the will of God ; and in the latter, he applied the incidents recorded to the illustration of the divine life of the soul. So, also, in a book on the marriage of Isaac, he explains the union of the soul with the word, as figured by the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca. At the conclusion of this treatise he exhorts believers not to set their affections on this life, or on the pleasures of the world ; but to consider the bitterness which so often attends them, the dangers which they create, and the wretchedness which must necessarily follow a sinful course. In speaking of the state of departed souls he says, “ All souls wait for what they have deserved. Some expect damnation, and others glory ; but while they thus wait, the former are not without pain, nor the latter without reward.” He speaks of seven degrees of happiness, the highest of which consists in the assurance of seeing God face to face. “ Let us go on, then,” he says, “ without fear, in the way to Jesus Christ ; let us march without anxiety to the assembly of the patriarchs and saints ; let us cast ourselves with confidence upon Abraham’s bosom. Yes, thou holy patriarch ! open to us thy bosom ; extend thine arms to these poor faithful. Jesus is gone before us to prepare habitations where we are to be received. He promised to do this

even before we asked it of him. We desire to follow thee, O Lord ! but do thou call us unto thee, that so we may effectually follow thee, because without thee no man can ascend unto thee. Thou art the way, the truth, and the life : thou givest us the power, the faith, and the reward. Receive us, since thou art the way ; confirm us, since thou art the truth ; grant us life, since thou art the author of life. Make us to enjoy that good thing which David desired ; show us that eternal, that immutable bliss which we may possess for all eternity."

His courage and zeal for the poor are powerfully illustrated in the treatise entitled, "Of Naboth and the Poor." He says at the beginning of the discourse, "The history of Naboth is ancient, if we consider the times in which the events recorded were transacted, but in practice they happen daily. For where is the rich man who does not covet other men's goods ? Is it not daily seen that the rich would take from the poor the little estate which they possess, and drive them from the inheritance of their ancestors ? Where can one be found content with what he has ? There has not been one Ahab only in the world. He is born in it every day. There has not been one Naboth only killed. There are some such every day destroyed. Every day are the poor overthrown, driven away, persecuted, and reduced to famine by the injustice of the rich."

In a season of great distress, Ambrose broke up the gold and silver vessels of the church, and sold the metal, to procure money for the ransom of those who had been taken captive by the enemy. He was often reproved for this action ; but he answered, "The church was founded without gold ; and if she have it now, she has it to give, and not to keep. What would be said of a bishop, who,

to preserve the lifeless vessels, would suffer the living members of Christ to perish? Would he say, I am afraid lest the temple of the Lord should be spoiled of its ornaments? If he so reasoned, might it not be answered, that it is not necessary that the sacraments of the altar should be administered in gold and silver; that the deliverance of captives is an ornament much more pleasing in the sight of God; that those vessels could not be put to a nobler use than that of redeeming the lives of Christians; that the real treasure of the Lord is that which has the same effect with his blood; that then a vessel is known to be truly the Lord's when there is a twofold redemption to be observed in it—that is, when the visible vessel redeems from the earthly enemy, those whom the blood of Jesus Christ has redeemed from sin?"

Ambrose was deeply imbued with classical literature, and had carefully studied the ancient philosophers. His "Book of Offices" affords many pleasing illustrations of the use which a pious mind may make of this species of learning. Having quoted the celebrated remark of Scipio, that "he was never busier nor less alone than when he was by himself," Ambrose observes, "that the idea was older than Scipio; and that it had been verified in a more illustrious manner in the examples of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and the apostles, who did so many wonderful things when they seemed to be unoccupied." He adds, "that a just man is never alone, because he is always with God; that he is never idle, because he is always meditating; that he appears to be unknown, and yet is renowned; that when he is thought to be dead, he is enjoying a happier life; that he is never more content than when others think him in affliction; that he is never

richer than when he is poor, because his real prosperity consists entirely in justice and honesty."

One of the most important of the treatises found among the works of Ambrose, is that "On the Sacraments." It was addressed to persons newly baptized; and enables us to judge of the mode of teaching then employed by the ministers of the church.

"After having spoken to you," says the author, "on the subject of morality, and proposed to you, while reading the Proverbs, the examples of the patriarchs and prophets, that you might be accustomed to follow the conduct of the saints, and to lead a life becoming those who are purified by baptism; having done this, it is now time to discourse to you of the mysteries, and to explain the sacraments; for if we had spoken of them before you were initiated, we should have thought that we were performing rather than explaining them. Now, therefore, open your ears to receive the sweet word of eternal life, which we signified to you when we celebrated the ceremony; and by which, saying, *Ephphatha*, we trusted they would so "be opened" that those who came to be baptized might know what was demanded of them, and what they were to answer. At length you were introduced into the place where the sacrament was to be administered; you were called upon to renounce the devil and his works, the world and its pomps and pleasures. You found in this place the waters, and a minister to consecrate them; the body was plunged into this water to wash away sins; the Holy Spirit descended upon this water; you were not to fix your mind upon the outward part, but to consider the divine virtue in it. Do not imagine that it is the water which purifies you; it is the Holy Spirit. There are three things in baptism, the water, the blood, and the

Spirit. Without these three things the sacrament is not complete. Neither the remission of sins nor grace is received, unless it be in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The baptism of Jews and infidels has no purifying power. It is the Holy Spirit, which formerly descended under the figure of a dove, which sanctifies the waters. We must not consider the merit of the priest, for in reality it is our Lord Jesus Christ who baptizes. You made profession of believing in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. After this you approached the priest; he anointed you, and your feet were washed. This sacrament blots out your hereditary sins, and the baptism itself blots out the sins contracted by your own will. After this you received the white garments, to signify that you were stripped of sin and clothed with innocency. You received the seal of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of wisdom and power. The Father hath marked you out, the Son hath confirmed you, and the Holy Spirit hath given you assurance of salvation. And now you run to the heavenly feast, and see the altar prepared where you receive a nourishment infinitely better than *manna*, a bread more excellent than that of angels, even the flesh of Jesus Christ, the body of life, the incorruptible *manna*, the substance, of which the manna was only the figure."

It has been often questioned whether this treatise was really written by St. Ambrose, or by some other author. But to whomever we ascribe it, the evangelical character of the sentiments indicates the existence of a very strong religious feeling in the age when it appeared; while, on the other hand, it is difficult to account for the distinction made between one part of the service, described as taking away original sin, and the other as removing actual sin.

Such a distinction is plainly unauthorized by Scripture ; and to admit it, is to endanger the value and dignity of the sacrament as a divine institution.

While we admire, then, the spiritual tone of the language and feelings, apparent in early treatises like this supposed work of St. Ambrose, we must also lament the growing love of ceremonies and practices invented to assist the comprehension of the poor and weak, but often obscuring the very doctrine, in its fundamental principles, which they were originally intended to unfold. In process of time the ceremony became as important as the doctrine, and thus the explanation of the former was given at the expense of the latter.

CHAPTER XIV.

ST. AUGUSTINE—HIS EARLY LIFE—HIS CONVERSION—SUBSEQUENT LABOURS—HIS DEATH.

•THE influence which St. Ambrose exercised, as described in the preceding chapter, important and extensive as it was, was confined to his own age. It was personal rather than intellectual, or, in the wider meaning of the word, spiritual. None could approach him without being impressed with reverence for holiness ; none could hear of his charity without admiring the religion which nourished it with food so proper to its support. But when he died, the influence of his name and character would soon have ceased to be felt, but for the permanent impression which they had made on the mind of a man who was destined by God to be the light, not only of his own but of future ages.

Augustine was born in the year 354, at Tagasta, in Numidia. His father was not a man of rank, but had sufficient wealth to enable him to afford his son all the advantages of a liberal education. He took, however, little interest in religion ; and Augustine was entirely indebted for his instruction in Christianity to the pious care of his mother, Monica, a woman of extraordinary virtue and ability. His early years were employed in the acquisition of that grammatical learning which formed so important a part of the education of those times. By a faculty which distinguished him through life, he appears to have instinctively watched the developement of his

thoughts, the growing force and clearness of his apprehensions. In this respect even the earliest pages of his Confessions have a peculiar interest ; and if other great men had given us an equally exact account of their intellectual state in infancy and youth, we should know far more than we are otherwise likely to learn of the phenomena of genius.

Of his first going to school, he says, "O God ! my God ! what miseries did I now encounter, and what impostures, when the way of right living which was then proposed to me, a child, was to be obedient to those who instructed me how to become glorious in this world, and how to excel in those wordy arts which open the way to human honours and false-named wealth ! And so I was put to school to learn these arts ; and when, poor boy, I knew no profit of them, yet was I miserably beaten if I profited not in them. And this hard usage was permitted by my sage superiors ; and many who had trod that path before us had chalked out the wearisome and craggy ways through which we were constrained to follow them, great pain and sorrow being thus endlessly multiplied to the sons of Adam.

"We little ones meanwhile observed, that men, O God, prayed unto thee. And we learnt of them to do the same ; believing thee, as far as we could apprehend, to be some great one, who, not appearing to our senses, could, notwithstanding, hear and relieve our necessities. I began, therefore, while yet a child to pray unto thee, my aid and refuge ; and then first accustomed my unskilled tongue to the invoking of thy holy name ; and I implored thee, with no little passion, though so young, to save me from punishment at school."*

* Confessions, b. i. c. 9.

It is evident from this, that Augustine's early years, like those of so many other good men, were rendered miserable by the injudicious severity of his instructors. The bitterness of feeling which is mingled with his confessions of sin, shows how indelibly impressed upon his memory were the sorrows which he had then to endure. "Who is he," he asks, "who, weighing things well, can justify my being beaten when a boy for playing at ball, when by such play I was only hindered from a speedier acquisition of those vain arts with which I was to play so much more unbecomingly when I grew old? Nor did he by whom I was corrected do anything better himself; for if defeated in any paltry criticism by a fellow-teacher, he was far more tormented with rage and envy than I was when overcome at some game by my companions."

While still a boy, he was seized with some dangerous sickness. He had been sufficiently instructed in the knowledge of the gospel to believe, that he could only be saved by the merits and intercession of Jesus Christ. According to the custom of the age, he had been signed, at his birth, with the sign of the cross, and seasoned with salt, as a symbol of incorruption. But he had not yet received baptism. With a passionate earnestness, which proves how deeply his heart was even then impressed with religious convictions, he besought his parents to let him be baptized. "I importuned," he says, "the piety of my own mother and of our common mother, the church, for the baptism of thy Christ, my Lord and God. And this much perplexed mother of my flesh now travailed far more dearly in the womb of her chaste heart of the second birth of my eternal salvation, by her faith in thee, than she had before done in my natural birth. And thus travailing, she was preparing with all speed to have me

initiated, and purged with the salutary sacraments,* confessing thee, O Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins."

But the sickness which had assumed so threatening a character rapidly abated; and it was then thought advisable to defer Augustine's baptism to a later period. The feeling with which this delay originated was very general in the early church. Sin, after baptism, appeared in the eyes of the primitive Christians as involving a ten-fold degree of guilt. "How much better," says Augustine, "had it been for me to have been so early healed! and that the health of my soul being thus restored, by my own strict care and that of my friends, and being preserved by thy grace, it might have been ever after kept entire! This surely had been much better. But my good mother, already foreseeing how many and how great billows of temptations were ready, when childhood was past, to assail and overwhelm my now unbridled youth, thought it better that I should stand exposed to their fury unbaptized, and as yet a lump of rude clay, than that, being new-moulded by the sacraments, I should hazard the defacing of thy image thus newly reimpresed upon me."†

Both his father and mother were anxious that Augustine should acquire a large acquaintance with the Greek as well as Latin classics. But the methods employed to instruct him in the former so completely disgusted him, that he made but little progress in the language; and was only able, even in mature years, to construe passages in the Greek fathers with labour and difficulty.‡ In Latin, on

* It was the custom at this period to administer the Eucharist, and even to children, immediately after baptism.

† Confessions, b. i c. 11.

‡ Tillemont *Historie Ecclesiastique*, t. xiii. p. 7.

the contrary, his advancement was rapid and extensive. He studied the poets with great avidity, and his exercises gained sufficient applause to excite in his mind the most ambitious desires and rivalries.

Having enumerated many of the sins and follies^o of his childhood, Augustine concludes the first book of his Confessions with a thanksgiving for the endowments which, with all his defects, he recognized as the gift of God. "And yet, O Lord, thanks be unto thee, thou most excellent builder and great commander of all this universe, even though thou hadst advanced me no further than to this perfection as a child. For then I had a being, I had life and sense, and an innate care for the general safety of my individual existence, a copy of that most secret unity of thine from which I had my being. I kept also a guard upon the acts of my outward senses with those which were more inward; and even then, as to the smallest objects, and my perception of them, I delighted in truth, and hated to be deceived. Then, too, was I enriched with a memory powerful to retain things; with speech to deliver them; with sociableness to converse; and a disposition to avoid grief, baseness, and ignorance. And what was there not in such a wisely built creature as this deserving admiration and love? But all these things were the gift of my God. They were not of my own bestowing. Good they are; and they are myself. Good, therefore, is he who so made me; and he is my goodness; and I rejoiced in him as to all those good things by which I was made so worthy a creature as even a child is. My only sin then was that I sought myself, and those other delights, sublimities, and truths, not in him, but in his creatures; and so, in place of them, I found sorrow shame, and error. But now, thanks be unto thee,

my sweet delight, my glory, my trust, my God ! Thanks be unto thee for those thy good gifts. But do thou keep them for me, for so shalt thou keep me also ; and these things shall still increase and grow to perfection ; and so shall I also be under thy care ; for even my own being is a gift which I have received from thee."

Augustine was in his sixteenth year when he returned from school at Madaura. Famous as was the academy in that city, his father, being ambitious to secure his advancement, determined to send him, at the end of the vacation, to Carthage. In the meanwhile the natural tendencies of the human heart began to display themselves in Augustine's vicious pursuits. The most licentious youths of Tagasta were his chosen companions. His father, a mere man of the world, only smiled at his son's irregularities ; and the pious Monica gave up all hopes of restraining his impetuous disposition when she had in vain exhausted the arts of maternal persuasion.

The sum necessary to support him at Carthage was furnished with difficulty by his parents. A rich citizen of Tagasta, named Romanien, then resident at Carthage, observing Augustine's straitened circumstances, afforded him liberal assistance. He was thus enabled to pursue his studies with ease and comfort, and he speedily acquired a general reputation for exalted genius. But the state of society in the capital, and the character of his associates, were little calculated to improve his morals. He tells us, accordingly, that he speedily fell into the most grievous sins. His heart and conscience were lacerated for many years after by the recollection of his life at Carthage. "Such," he says, "was the life I led. But ought such a life, O my God ! to be called life ?"*

* Confessions, b. iii. c. 2.

His talent for the study of rhetoric had enabled him to attain the highest place in the school where it was taught. In the midst of all his errors, he kept his eye steadily fixed on the object for which he had been sent to Carthage. Eminence in the forum, or in one of the great seats of learning, was both his own desire and that of his parents. For some time, therefore, he was fully satisfied with the success which attended his rhetorical exercises; but in his nineteenth year he became acquainted with Cicero's exhortation to the study of philosophy, entitled "Hortensius." The reading of this work so convinced him of the comparative vanity of mere rhetorical arts, that it was the first thing which altered his affections, turned his thoughts to God, and rendered his purposes and wishes altogether different from what they had formerly been.

But, delighted and affected as he was with the wisdom of Cicero's sentiments, there was one important deficiency in the treatise with which he was so charmed,—the name of Christ was not there. This taught him that he must look still further if he wished to find real comfort and support in his studies. "Because this name of my Saviour, thy Son, O Lord, my tender heart had piously imbibed and deeply apprehended, even with my mother's milk; and whatsoever wanted this name, however learned, polished, or important, could not wholly content me."

Still, hopeful as were these sentiments, Augustine's mind was too much pre-occupied with natural pride and conceit to enable him to see at once the beauty of divine truth. He turned his attention to the Scriptures; but the style of the sacred volume seemed to him utterly unworthy of being compared with Cicero's; for his conceit, he says, made him abhor its sober temper, while the

weakness of his sight would not allow him to pierce its inner meaning. The categories of Aristotle, which he now began to study, excited far more respect in his mind than the simplicity of Scripture. He mastered, by his own solitary efforts, the difficulties of the ancient logic, and found his success in this pursuit of no small use in his subsequent disputes with the enemies of truth. About the same time, also, he read numerous treatises on the various branches of liberal science, adding to his other acquisitions a knowledge of geometry and music.

Hesitating, as he was now doing, between the paths of philosophy and religion ; charmed, on the one hand, by the fascinating sweetness of Cicero, and disgusted, on the other, by what seemed to him the uninviting plainness of Scripture, Augustine stood exposed and unarmed amidst the host of heresies which so unhappily abounded in those times. The most corrupt and dangerous of the sects then existing, was that of the Manicheans ; but it was that which, of all others, was the most likely to engage the attention of a man like Augustine. The doctrines which they taught were bold and mystical ; and they were mingled, at the same time, with a certain degree of sensual imaginativeness, which tended still further to excite the feelings of so sensitive a mind. He entered into their views, and joined in their practices with ready sympathy. For some time the gradual unfolding of the pretended mysteries embraced in the Manichean system was sufficient to occupy his thoughts. They alienated his affections from the earlier pursuits of his youth, and thus left him, for about nine years, to the tempestuous tossings of the wild sea of heretical speculation.

“Thou didst send thine hand from on high,” says Augus-

time, in the fervent language of confession, "and snatched my soul from this profound darkness; for my mother, thy faithful servant, wept for me more than other mothers weep at the funerals of their children. She saw that I was dead as to faith and the spirit received from thee; and thou, O Lord, didst hear her."

But during the nine years here spoken of, he had returned to his native town of Tagasta. There he employed himself in teaching rhetoric, and had for his auditors several persons of piety and distinction. The death of one of his friends afflicted him so severely, that he could no longer endure to remain at home. He, therefore, returned to Carthage; and, in that far wider and more conspicuous scene of exertion, continued to pursue the profession of a rhetorician. His views of the art which he had undertaken to teach were far nobler than those ordinarily adopted. "In those years," he says, "I taught the art of rhetoric; and while I was myself overcome by lusts, I sold a victorious loquacity. Yet even then, O Lord, as thou knowest, I desired to have honest and virtuous scholars; and to them I taught deceits without deceit; yet not those deceits whereby the life of an innocent man should be endangered, but those by which the life of the guilty might sometimes be preserved."*

Happily for Augustine and the church, the clouds of error which had prevented him from discovering the real character of the Manichees, were gradually dispersed. He saw that his associates indulged themselves in the grossest immoralities; that they employed their mysticism to cloak an actual atheism; and that, however lofty their language and pretended sublimity of sentiment, they were

* Confessions, b. iv. c. 2.

in many respects, grovelling in darkness and earthliness. One of the most celebrated of the Manichean teachers was Faustus, a Numidian. His eloquence and supposed wisdom gained for him a vast degree of influence among the most ardent members of his sect. Augustine had long desired to meet with this renowned doctor. His wish was at length accomplished : Faustus came to Carthage. Augustine eagerly attended the assembly in which he publicly expounded the main articles of his creed. The acute understanding and well-stored memory of the saint enabled him soon to discover that Faustus was a mere rhetorician ; that he knew little of philosophy or divinity ; that he was popular only because he was skilful in the use of language, and in the telling of agreeable fables.

Too timid, however, of his own decisions to form a final judgment of the character of Faustus, without a closer inquiry, he desired a private conference with him. But Faustus readily acknowledged his ignorance of the great questions which Augustine wished him to solve. His modesty, in this respect, deeply affected the inquirer ; but the Manichean system lost much of its charm and interest in the eyes of Augustine ; and from this period he despaired of finding any satisfaction in professing its principles.

Unsettled in mind, and disgusted with the rude, licentious character of the young men at Carthage, he resolved to leave that city and visit Rome. He was now twenty-nine years old ; and while desirous of escaping from so turbulent a school as that of Carthage, he hoped also to obtain for himself a position worthy of his genius in the ancient capital of the world. His mother could not endure the thought of parting with him. To escape her importunities, he pretended, while preparing to embark,

that he was only about to take leave of a friend. Pacifying her for the night, she consented to retire to rest in a cottage on the sea-shore. When the morning came, Monica hastened to look for the ship in which she had left Augustine with his friend. But the vessel had weighed anchor during the night, and its white sails could only be just discerned in the far distance. Augustine bitterly reproached himself for the deception which he had practised ; but shows, at the same time, how wonderfully God overruled his mother's affectionate desires for the accomplishing of those very ends which it was her most anxious prayer to attain.

The hopes which Augustine had formed of success at Rome, were destined to be disappointed. Though his school soon became popular, and was attended by numerous hearers, he saw himself in danger of being reduced to poverty. The young men who delighted to listen to his lectures neglected to pay him any fees. Unwilling to struggle against such disheartening circumstances, he readily accepted an invitation to open a school of rhetoric at Milan.

His removal to Milan was the happiest event in his life. He thereby became acquainted with St. Ambrose ; and the way was providentially opened for his conversion. "When I came to Milan," he says, "I had immediate access to the bishop, Ambrose, famous among good men, through all the world. His most eloquent sermons, O Lord, freely ministered to thy people the pure flour of thy wheat, and the celestial gladness of thine oil, and the sober inebriation of thy spiritual wine. And I began much to love him,—not at first, as a teacher of truth, for I despaired to find it in thy church, but as a man kindly disposed towards me. And I diligently heard him preach-

ing to the people, not, however, with any right intention, but to try his eloquence ; to determine whether it answered to the vast reputation which he enjoyed ; and whether it flowed higher or lower than was reported. And thus I stood—very attentive to his expressions, but indifferent to his matter. And I was much charmed with the elegance of his language. It was more learned but not so lively and pleasing as that of Faustus. With regard to the matter, there was no comparison ; the one vainly expatiating on Manichean delusions, the other profitably teaching the doctrines of salvation.”

The account which Augustine has given of his conversion is equally valuable and interesting. It shows us, by his remarkable example, how the worst errors of the mind, how the pride of the spirit, and the corruptions of the heart may all be overcome by the preaching of the divine word. Thus he tells us that, when wholly intent not upon what Ambrose said, but upon how he said it, “there descended into his soul with the language which he valued the matter which he slighted ;” and that when he opened his heart to entertain the eloquence of the pious bishop’s sayings, the truth entered with them. “Yet this,” he adds, “was by slow degrees. For first, there seemed to me that some plea might be made for the Catholic faith ; and that which I formerly thought could not be defended against the objections of the Manicheans, I now began to consider might possibly be supported. This was especially the case after I had heard one or two or more enigmatical and obscure places of the Old Testament explained, by which, formerly, while understanding them literally I was slain spiritually.”

So also, he says, “Very many places of those books being thus resolved, I began to blame my despair ; but

thus far only, that I no longer thought it quite impossible that any answer should be given to those who opposed and derided the law and the prophets. I did not, as yet, come to the conclusion that the Catholic way should be taken, because it was upheld by those who were able without absurdity to repel objections ; nor yet, that what I believed on the contrary side should be condemned, because both were defensible.”*

In the midst of the mental struggles by which he was thus oppressed, his affectionate spirit was filled with joy and thankfulness by the arrival of his mother. Daring the perils of a long and dangerous journey, the aged Monica had sought her son, as now especially needing the support of her prayers and love. She heard of his approaching desertion of the Manicheans with no expression of surprise. God, she felt assured, would hear her prayers, and in his own good time bestow that grace upon her son for which she was so continually and so fervently asking. In the encouraging counsels of Ambrose she found a still further support to her faith ; and the progress which Augustine was evidently though slowly making, convinced her that she had not trusted in a vain hope. He was now thirty years old, but was daily becoming less confident of the correctness of his own unassisted reasonings. Retiring within himself, he thus lamented his uncertain state, and resolved upon adopting a course which seemed to promise something more satisfactory than that which he had hitherto pursued. Distressed at the retrospect of his vain search after truth, he exclaimed, “ But let us not despair ; let us rather inquire with greater diligence See, there are not those absurdities in the ecclesiastical books which

* Confessions, b. v. c. 14.

we imagined ; they may be otherwise and rationally interpreted. Finally, let me remain contented with those views of religion in which I was brought up till the truth be more clearly revealed. But where, or when shall we seek it ? Ambrose is not at leisure, nor have we the leisure to read books. And where shall we find these books ? With what, or at what time procure them ? Upon whose recommendation take them ?”

The doubts thus painfully rising in his mind he had, at length, the courage to answer as one resolved never to cease till he had found the truth. “Nay,” he exclaims, “let us set some portion of time apart, let us devote some certain hours to the salvation of our soul. There is great hope for us. The church universal does not teach what we imagined she taught, or inculcate the errors of which we vainly accused her. Her learned men condemn it as blasphemous to regard God as limited by the measurements of a human shape. Why doubt we then to knock, that the door may be opened ? My scholars employ the forenoon. How do I spend the rest of my time ? Why not devote it to this work ? But should I do so, when could I visit my more influential friends, whose favours I need ? When could I prepare the matter which is sold to my pupils ? When refresh my spirits by relaxation ? Perish all ! Let these vain and empty solitudes be dismissed, and let us set ourselves earnestly upon this inquisition of truth. The life we live is wretched. Death is uncertain. If it should suddenly seize on us, in what a state should we depart ? If we continue to neglect these things, shall we not be punished for our neglect ? And if death is to deprive the soul of all its sense and cares together, the truth of this, if it be so, ought surely to be determined. But God forbid that this should be the case. Surely it

can be no vain, no empty argument, that the authority of the Christian faith is spread over all the world with so great pre-eminence and renown ; and surely the divine hand would not have wrought such great things for us, if, with the death of the body, were also wasted and extinguished the life of the soul ? Why then do we delay to give up the hopes of the present world and devote our minds entirely to the search after God and happiness ?”

But Augustine's heart was not yet sufficiently free from the fascinations of sense, to enable him to answer this last question, as resolutely as he could reply to those which belonged rather to the struggles of intellect, than to those of feeling and imagination. He allowed himself to ask why it was necessary to give up the world so soon ? Or why he might not reasonably look for some preferment in the state, marry a rich wife, and so place himself in a condition for pursuing the study of wisdom without such an entire sacrifice of all present or worldly enjoyments ?

Conscious of the danger of such delays, he says, “ While I reasoned in this manner, and these contrary winds were driving me to and fro, the time ran on ; and I was backward, my God, to be converted unto thee. Still, though I delayed, from day to day, to live in thee, I deferred not daily to die more and more in myself. In love with a beatifical life, I feared to find it where it was ; and I sought after it by flying from it.”* Augustine had two friends especially desirous of proving their attachment to his views and principles. These friends were Nebridius and Alypius, both of them men of virtue and ability ; and the latter particularly distinguished by a pure and exalted sentiment of morality. Augustine, who had

* *Confessions*, b. vi. c. 11.

formed an illicit connexion at Carthage, entertained, at the present time, serious thoughts of marriage. Alypius used his influence to the utmost to dissuade him from such a step. He represented to him the injurious effects which it might have both on his literary and religious character; how greatly the cares of domestic life would tend to divert his mind from the higher inquiries and exercises of holiness, and how much better it would be for him to devote his soul entirely to those pursuits which are so calculated to alienate the affections from temporal objects and employments.

But the persuasions of Alypius were unavailing. Augustine, after an imperfect struggle with himself, formed, at the end two years, another of those connexions which the low state of morals then allowed, and which therefore exposed him, though a public teacher, to but little censure. He still, however, proposed to marry; and his example induced Alypius and others of his friends to do the same. To prevent these engagements from interfering with the plan of life which they had fondly laid down, they formed the design of establishing a little society* in which, each giving up his income or property for the general good, they should have all things common, and so live among themselves in the enjoyment of peace and social harmony, and in the cultivation of all the nobler graces of the mind and spirit. Among those who expressed the greatest desire to establish such a community, was Romanien, who had so nobly aided Augustine at Carthage. He possessed considerable wealth, and happened to be at that time at Milan. Everything seemed in favour of the proposed plan; but the first steps taken to put it in execution

* Tillemont Memoires, t. xiii. art. xxviii. p. 66.

convinced even the most zealous of the party that it was impracticable. The wives or mistresses of the intended members, raised by their questions and jealousies an insuperable barrier to the success of the scheme. It was accordingly given up; but the exalted sentiments in which the idea of such an institution arose, continued to influence the minds of Augustine and his friends. Though convinced of the impracticability of retreating from the world and living only among themselves, they became every day more enraptured with the idea of intellectual and spiritual excellence. The study of Plato, to which they devoted themselves at this period, contributed in no slight degree, to fan the flame of this ambition. Augustine entered with delight into the speculations of the philosopher on the nature of God. They carried him still further from the gross notions which had long darkened and burdened his mind; but he beautifully describes in his *Confessions* the unsatisfactory nature of the conclusions to which he arrived, the absolute need which he still felt, though aided by the sublimest of human reasoners, of the teaching of God's word and Spirit. Referring to what he had learnt from Plato respecting the nature of Deity, he says, "These things, O God, I knew concerning thee, but I was still far too infirm to enjoy thee. And I talked as one that had knowledge; whereas, had I not sought out the way to thee in Christ, our Saviour, I must have been eternally lost. I began to affect wisdom while full of my punishment; and instead of deploring my misery I was puffed up and exalted with my knowledge. But where was that charity which builds on the foundation of humility, even Christ Jesus? When could my books have ever taught me this?"

He attributes his being led to the study of Plato before

acquiring a proper knowledge of Scripture, to God's wise intention that he might afterwards discern "between blind presumption and humble confession ; between those who saw to what place they should go but saw not the way, and those who saw the way itself which leads into that beatifical country—a country to be not only seen but inhabited by them." And he remarks on this : "Had I been first instructed in thy holy books and Thou, in their familiar entertainment, hadst then grown sweet and dear to me ; and then afterward I had become acquainted with these volumes of Plato, perhaps, either their novelty, as last looked upon, might have removed me in some degree from the foundation of piety ; or, though I had stedfastly preserved the saving principles and affections which I had imbibed therefrom, still I might have imagined that those other books, studied by themselves, would have been sufficient to produce the same effects."*

Thus urged on by the secret impulses of divine grace, Augustine was far from remaining satisfied even with the noblest speculations of philosophy. He felt that however beautiful the vague dream of genius, it was not to be depended upon in matters of such importance as salvation and eternal happiness. Notwithstanding, therefore, the little interest he had taken in the Scriptures, so far as he had as yet read them, he resolved again to seek the divine volume, and to search its pages for the resolution of the great questions which agitated his soul.

The Epistles of St. Paul presented to his mind an inexhaustible treasure of wisdom and knowledge. "Seek, and ye shall find," seems addressed to the faithful, earnest reader of these epistles with most encouraging force, while

* Confessions, b. vii. c. 20.

he scans them line by line, contemplating the mystery of godliness in its union with the mystery of salvation. Augustine soon discovered how great was the mercy of God in leading him to such a fountain of sweet waters; how sure he might now be of obtaining that peace of heart, and illumination of spirit, after which he must evidently have continued to pant in vain, had his sources of consolation been confined to science and philosophy.

“I now betook myself,” he says,* “with extraordinary ardour to the venerable discourse of thy spirit, and above the rest of the apostles, to the writings of St. Paul. And quickly did those scruples vanish, as to those points wherein his discourse had formerly seemed contradictory to itself, or not in accordance with the law and the prophets. It now appeared to me one uniform piece of chaste and pure doctrine, and I learned to rejoice in it with reverence and trembling. And I studied it, and found the same truths stated in the writings of St. Paul which I had read in the other books of Scripture, but with great recommendation and advancing of thy grace.”

Full of anxiety to obtain the counsel of good and pious men, Augustine now resolved to seek the advice of Simplician. “Whereupon,” he says, “acquainting him with my griefs, I requested he would direct me what course of life were fittest for one so affected as I then was, to walk in thy way. For I saw the church full, and in it some following one course of life, and some another. And it much displeased me to continue any longer in a secular condition; and a great burden to me it was, now no more inflamed with my former desire of honour and wealth, to suffer any longer so grievous a servitude. For

* Confessions, b. vii. c. 21.

now these things yielded me no more delight in comparison of thy sweetness and the honour of thy house, which I loved."

Simplicianus received Augustine with the wisdom and tenderness of a father. He congratulated him on the circumstance that he had met with the works of philosophers who delighted less in fallacies and earthly notions than the generality of such writers; and that he had been led, in some measure, by the study of Plato, to meditate upon God and his eternal word. He then spoke, to him of Victorinus, a man celebrated for his wonderful learning, and to whose honour a statue had been erected in the Forum Romanum, but who, in his advanced years, rejoiced to confess that all his erudition was as nothing when compared with the light which he enjoyed on being converted to the gospel. But though acknowledging the truth of Christ's words, Victorinus could not at first sacrifice his worldly dignities and connexions. He declared to Simplicianus that he was a Christian. The latter replied, "I will not believe it, nor repute you such till I see you within the church." Victorinus ridiculed the idea of his entering the church having ought to do with his character as a believer. The contest was warmly carried on between the two friends, till at length, "by continual reading and meditating, Victorinus," says Augustine, "gathered more firmness, and fearing to be denied by Christ before his holy angels, if he feared to confess him before men; and appearing to himself guilty of a grievous crime, if he should be ashamed of the sacraments of the humility of the Eternal Word, while he was not ashamed of that sacrilegious worship of those proud devils, (of whom, being first a haughty imitator, he became also a worshipper,) he ceased to be ashamed of abandoning such vanity, and

blushed for not professing the truth. Most suddenly and unexpectedly then he said to Simplicianus—"Let us go to the church. There I will be made a Christian." And so, continues the narrative, transported with joy, Simplicianus immediately accompanied him to the sacred edifice ; where, when he had been initiated, as it is termed, in the first sacraments of instruction, he not long after gave in his name "to receive regeneration by baptism."

- When the day arrived on which the candidate for baptism was to make solemn profession of his faith, the clergy intimated to Victorinus, that, respecting his age and great reputation, they were willing to receive his confession in private. But he refused the proffered indulgence, observing, that there was no saving grace or power in the rhetoric which he had taught, but that he had never been ashamed of professing it in public. Why, therefore, he asked, should he fear the meek and humble flock of Christ, while pronouncing the words of the Lord, when he had not trembled before a far ruder and more censorious multitude, though he had then only his own words to utter ? *

The account which Simplicianus thus gave of Victorinus and his conversion, produced the wished-for effect upon Augustine's mind. He was filled with the desire of imitating his example. Victorinus had been, like himself, a professor of rhetoric, but had gladly ceased to pursue his early occupation on becoming a Christian. Augustine sighed deeply for the liberty which should leave him free to study God's word, without the interruption of worldly cares and pursuits. But even had outward circumstances

* Confessions, b. vi

enabled him at once to relinquish his profession, there still remained his own personal ambition, and some unbroken strings of passion, to bind him to the world and its concerns. "The burden," says he, "of secular affections,* as the pressure of sleep, sweetly kept me down ; and the thoughts wherein I meditated on thee, were like the strugglings of one who would fain awaken himself, but is still surprised with drowsiness, and relapses into his former slumbers. And though none would wish always to sleep, but all, of any sound judgment, do much prefer vigilancy, yet many times, from a benumbed laziness in his limbs, a man will delay to shake it off, and still more listingly entertaineth what already displeaseth him."

The conversation which he had soon after this with Pontitianus, an old friend of his from Africa, and who spoke to him of St. Anthony and other holy men, tended still further to inflame his zeal, and render him anxious to terminate the inward strife so pathetically described in his Confessions. Twelve years had now passed away since the reading of Cicero's Hortensius first awakened in his mind the desire of wisdom. In the spiritual struggles which he experienced, he was not alone. His friend Alipius understood the state of his mind, and shared his anxieties. One day, after Pontitianus had been conversing with them, they retired to their little garden, and there continued the discourse. Augustine's agony of soul at length overpowered him. He sought a deeper solitude, and there, in utter prostration of heart, poured out his supplication for Divine assistance. The words "Take up and read ;" "Take up and read," reached his ears. He regarded them as of Divine signification, and remembered the case of Anthony, who, happening to enter a church

where the sentence was just being read, "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven," regarded it as addressed to himself, and acted accordingly.

Hastening back, therefore, to the spot where he and Alipius had been conversing and reading, he took up the sacred volume, and opening it at once, his eyes immediately fell upon the words, "Not in rioting and drunkenness ; not in chambering and wantonness ; not in strife and envying ; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof."

This was sufficient to convince the awakened and susceptible soul of Augustine, that, whatever might be his after course, his first step must be to forsake the world—to bid adieu to the follies of ambition—to subdue his passions, and sacrifice to holiness and truth the objects which vanity had taught him most fondly to pursue and cherish.

It requires a particular state of mind to enable us to estimate rightly the feelings by which Augustine was moved at this stage of his career. The world can know nothing of such emotions—it is absolutely incapable of judging properly of their character. But men of piety even are often found incapable of appreciating the deep sincerity, the intense beauty of the devotion to God which characterizes every thought of a mind impressed, as Augustine's now was, with the convictions of an early faith. He was converted. Let us take the word in its best, because its simplest and its fullest sense. His thoughts, wishes, hopes, were all changed. This might have been the case had he only suffered one of those distressing revolutions in outward circumstances which are

so often found to alter the form and character of men's minds. But the innermost affections of his heart, while as powerful and ardent as ever, were suddenly transferred to new objects ; were violently diverted and estranged from earthly things, and fixed on those which are spiritual and heavenly. This was an effect which no ordinary or natural cause can produce. It was the result of operations which God's Spirit alone could have the wisdom to plan, or the power to accomplish.

Assured that some mighty and permanent change had taken place in his soul, Augustine hastened to his mother to acquaint her with the happy event.* The venerable Monica listened with profound joy to the account which her son and his friend brought her. It was an answer to the numberless prayers which she had offered up to heaven. The son, whose spiritual death and condemnation she had contemplated with such dread, was now born again, and a child of God.

Augustine would gladly have ceased at once from the employment in which he was engaged. He seems to have considered the art of rhetoric, as then taught, peculiarly unfit for the study or practice of a devout Christian. It had long been his wish to leave the professor's chair. Even his imperfect notion of the gospel was sufficient to convince him that truth and simplicity were virtues essentially necessary to the Christian character. But now that he felt himself animated and enlightened by a new spirit, he could not but resolve, whatever the sacrifice of his brilliant hopes and prospects, to give up a profession which involved the sacrifice of evangelical consistency.

* Confessions, b. viii.

The step which he thus determined to take he would fain have taken at the moment. But it wanted only about twenty days to the vintage vacation, and he felt that he might be charged with affectation or enthusiasm if he left his pupils so suddenly, and when, by waiting two or three weeks longer, he might resign his charge without creating unnecessary excitement.

When the longed-for day of liberty arrived, he retired with his friends to a country-house at Cassiacum, kindly offered him by Verecundus. There he spent his time in reading, meditation, and prayer. Having written to Ambrose to acquaint him with his present state, and to request his advice as to what portions of Scripture he might most profitably study, the venerable bishop advised him to read the prophet Isaiah. Augustine observes, "I suppose he recommended me to study this prophet, because he foreshows the Gospel more clearly than the other prophets, and so plainly predicts the calling of the Gentiles." But he could not understand, he adds, the first chapter of the book, and therefore "laid it aside, to be resumed when he was more expert in the Gospel writings."*

At the approach of Easter, Augustine sent in his name as a candidate for baptism. His son Adeodatus, (whom he had by his mistress, long since returned to Africa, and spending a life of humble piety,) was now about fifteen years of age; and was as distinguished for heavenly-mindedness, as he was for natural talent and ability. Augustine, knowing the maturity of his faith, rejoiced at being able to associate him with himself, and his friend Alipius, as a candidate for baptism. Adeodatus died in his youth; and his father, full of intense affection, says, "I remem-

* Confessions, b. ix. c. v.

ber him with the more security, having nothing further now to dread either for his childhood, his youth, or his man's estate."

The solemn rite was in due time administered, and Augustine thus describes his emotions on the occasion: "We were all baptized together; and the solicitude and anguish of our former ill-led life now vanished from us. Nor was I satiated in those days, O Lord, with the wonderful sweetness which I enjoyed in contemplating the height of thy counsels for the salvation of man. How much did I weep in the singing of thy psalms and hymns, being passionately moved by the melodious voices of thy church! Those voices flowed in at my ears, and thy truth distilled into my heart; and there the affection of piety boiled over, and thence flowed down tears, in which I found much solace."*

Soon after his baptism Augustine prepared to return to Africa. He had reached Ostia, on his way from Rome, when his mother, Monica, who accompanied him, fell sick and died. It was only five days before her death, that she and her son were conversing together with peculiar elevation of thought on the subject of a future life. "We stood alone," he says, "leaning on a window that looked forth into the garden of the house in which we lodged, and where, retired from company and noise, after the hard toil of a long journey, we were repairing our spirits for pursuing it by sea. There we were conversing together, we two alone, very sweetly; and, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, we were inquiring between ourselves, in the presence of the *Truth*, which thou thyself art, O Lord!

* Confessions, b. ix. c. vi.

what the eternal life of the blessed hereafter shall be. 'Which eye has not seen, nor ear heard ; nor hath it entered into the heart of man.'"

Augustine suffered great anguish at the loss of his mother, so fondly and deeply loved. But his faith taught him to suppress immoderate grief ; and, at the same time, furnished him with abundant supplies of consolation and hope. Instead of now proceeding at once to Africa, he revisited Rome.* There he remained some time, and wrote two or three of his earlier works. On his return to his native country, he landed at Carthage, whence after a short residence he proceeded to Tagasta. There he possessed a small rural estate. To this he retired with some of his friends, and led a life of complete monastic seclusion and self-denial. Resigning every personal claim to his little property, he gave whatever money he received from the sale of his lands to the poor. His time was wholly spent in study, in acts of charity, and prayer. Several of his voluminous writings were composed at this period ; and the Pelagians began already to feel the force of his attacks.

But Augustine's profound humility rendered him anxious, while devoting himself to the service of God, to avoid the solemn responsibilities of the priesthood. He was, therefore, unwilling even to visit any place where he feared the people might endeavour to impose upon him a ministerial character. But Divine Providence having called him to Hippo, where a presbyter was needed, he found himself suddenly constrained to accept the office. It was in vain that he besought the people and their bishop not to force upon him a charge for which he felt himself un-

* Tillemont, *Mémoires Ecclesiastiques*, t. xiii.

worthy. His prayers and tears were unavailing. He was ordained priest, and his zeal and effectual preaching soon proved to the community how wise a measure had been taken in overcoming his resistance. The aged bishop of the place, Valerius, delighted to proclaim that Heaven had given an answer to his prayers in sending Augustine to labour among his people. In the course of a few years, he desired to have him consecrated as his coadjutor, with the prospect of his becoming his successor in the bishopric. Both these events took place, and Augustine's elevation in rank enabled him still more effectually to accomplish the various designs which his piety and noble talents fitted him to undertake.

That which remains to be said of his labours forms naturally a part of the general history of the Church. He died at the age of seventy-six, with faculties unimpaired, and a spirit full of the richest graces of wisdom and holiness.

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